

Beyond the Looking Glass: The Narcissistic Woman Reflected and
Embodied in Classic Hollywood Film

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Declaration

I declare that the following work is my own, and that I have clearly cited all external sources. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

Abstract

Linking the images of stars as contrasting as Bette Davis, Marilyn Monroe, and Gloria Swanson, and uniting genres like romantic comedy, *film noir*, and melodrama, the figure of the narcissistic woman stands as a versatile, ever-present extra- and intra-diegetic force in the dream factory of classical Hollywood. She is, in fact, the lead in what sociologist Edgar Morin conceptualizes in *The Stars* (1957) as a golden-age “myth of love”: Calling upon the psychic and sensory investment of her fans with her otherworldly aura and material impact, the female star emerges as both the active subject of romantic narratives and the admired on-screen partner in a love affair with the spectator. Like Ovid’s original Narcissus before her, the narcissistic woman of Hollywood exists, as Morin describes it, to “focus...love’s magic on [herself].”

Contemporary film theory, however, has interpreted the star not as a subjective force in this dialogical “magic” between actress and spectator but rather as the product of a patriarchal system of filmmaking, one that objectifies women both on the screen and in the audience. In an effort to further analyze the questions of identity and representation evoked by the female star and her audience, this thesis will seek an alternative to the binaries that tend to characterize the traditional understanding of women in classic Hollywood (that is, spectator/star, narcissistic subject/idealized object; male/female, active/passive). Rather than read narcissism as a one-dimensional, monologic preoccupation with one’s image, this research posits that classic cinematic representations of the woman’s relationship to the self invite an examination of the existential complexity of a figure negotiating the registers of corporeal reality and ethereal ideality, star persona and diegetic character. In the hopes of highlighting the active engagements – between star and role; spectator, actress, and filmic form itself – inspired by these cinematic entities and their

“myths of love,” this work will connect psychoanalytic concerns with Edgar Morin’s cultural history of Hollywood, Laura U. Marks’s theory of haptic visuality, and the phenomenological understanding of film outlined by Vivian Sobchack in an exploration of the embodied subjectivities borne by the on-screen Narcissus and her off-screen audience.

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Chapter I

The Narcissistic Woman: Reflections and Projections

In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid wrote of the original love affair with the self in the myth of Narcissus, a young man who adores his own reflection. Though loved by Echo, a nymph who may never speak for herself but can only repeat the last words of others' phrases, the exquisitely handsome Narcissus arrogantly rejects her as he has done with the numerous women and men who admire him. Devastated, Echo retreats to a cave where she pines for Narcissus until her body wastes away and only her voice remains. Later, another spurned admirer curses Narcissus to know the impossible love he inspires in others; and accordingly, Narcissus catches a glimpse of his reflection in a river and falls madly in love with it. Realizing that he has become infatuated with himself, a tormented Narcissus finally dies on the riverbank and spends his days in the underworld gazing at his image in the river Styx. Echo, witness to her loved one's deterioration, is left to repeat the laments of the mourning nymphs; and when the time comes to collect Narcissus's body, only a flower remains where he had lain (109 – 116).

Thousands of years later, in the closing image of Joseph L. Mankiewicz' 1950 film *All About Eve*, a young woman would stand before a mirror and embody a transformed Narcissus: the narcissistic female star and filmic heroine in classic Hollywood film. After tracing the usurpation of theatre star Margo Channing (Bette Davis)

by her ruthlessly ambitious protégée, Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter), the film concludes with a threat to Eve herself in the form of a devoted young fan named Phoebe (Barbara Bates). In these last moments, Phoebe stands before a three-way mirror in Eve's bedroom, wearing her idol's elegant evening cloak and clutching her award for achievement in the theatre. But Phoebe is not alone in her reverie. Indeed, she bows to the multitude of reflections surrounding her as she graciously accepts the inevitability of her own success; the imminence of the merging of her real self with the ideal selves mirrored before her.

This vision of narcissistic transcendence articulates metonymically the ability of classic Hollywood to echo Ovid's original myth while at the same time craft its revival and revision, as the tale of one man's passion for his reflection evolves into an exploration of feminine identity and awareness of self. In that final shot, Phoebe is not simply a young woman enthralled by her likeness, but rather a subject engaging with possible selves: She is a fan worshipping at the altar of stardom, wearing the borrowed robes of her idol; yet she is also an actress, seeking to replace Eve as she ascends that same altar. Unlike Narcissus, doomed to never attain the union of real self and ideal image, Hollywood poises Phoebe – as both fan and actress – on the threshold of a journey through the looking glass.

Linking the images of stars as contrasting as Bette Davis, Marilyn Monroe, and Gloria Swanson, and uniting genres like romantic comedy, *film noir*, and melodrama, the figure of the narcissistic woman stands as a versatile, ever-present extra- and intra-diegetic force in the dream factory of classical Hollywood. She is, in fact, the lead in what sociologist Edgar Morin conceptualizes in *The Stars* (1957) as a golden-age “myth of love” (30): Calling upon the psychic and sensory investment of her fans with her otherworldly aura and material impact, the female star emerges as both the active subject of romantic narratives and the admired on-screen partner in a love affair with the spectator. Like Ovid’s original Narcissus before her, the narcissistic woman of Hollywood exists, as Morin describes it, to “focus...love’s magic on [herself]” (ibid).

As the expansive cultural mythology crafted by Morin ceded to a more expressly academic critique of classic American cinema, however, the female star and her engagement with on-screen lovers and off-screen spectators were viewed with a feminist and psychoanalytic perspective. With the 1975 publication of Laura Mulvey’s canonical essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” the subsequent wave of feminist criticism in the 1980s interpreted the female Narcissus of classic film not as the recipient of love’s “magic” but rather as the product of a system of filmmaking objectifying to women both on the screen and in the audience. Through a psychoanalytic framework, feminist theorists interpreted the leading

ladies of Hollywood's golden age as symbols of male fantasy; as Mary Ann Doane wrote in "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," classic films are a "writing in images of the woman but not *for* her" (18). In engaging with these images of idealized womanhood, according to Doane, the female spectator consequently takes part in a narcissistic process through which she bears a subjective investment in that cinematic projection of femininity as the object of her desire (22). Where Morin's myth of love conceptualizes the female star/heroine as a subject of desire as well as an object thereof, the feminist perspective has viewed such women as passive figures subject *to* patriarchal visual pleasures; "cut," as Mulvey wrote, "to the measure" (26) of a fetishistic gaze that reduces the woman to an illusion of ideality.

In so approaching the female star and her diegetic counterparts with a kind of wariness – acknowledging her aesthetic appeal while attributing it to a reductive male gaze; interpreting ideality as a trick of purely surface allure – the 1970s/80s wave of feminist film criticism tended to assign the on-screen woman to the plane of the fragmented illusory. Though disclosing the patriarchal bias that underlay certain golden-age American works, such theoretical arguments avoided a direct engagement with the capacious subjectivity (rather than the passive object-ivity) of the female star. As, however, contemporary film scholarship moves away from a strictly psychoanalytic framework towards a relationship

to cinema informed by phenomenology, concepts of embodiment, and haptic visuality, there is the potential for the woman of classic Hollywood film to undergo a critical renaissance. Focusing upon an individual's subjective engagement with the material of the surrounding world, phenomenology resists abstracted models of identity and instead calls for an analysis of what theorist Vivian Sobchack has termed the "*existential particularity*" (*Address* xv) of experience – as embodied in both the human and cinematic form. By extension, the notion of haptic visuality as outlined by Laura U. Marks emphasizes the interplay between a given film's material presence and the spectator's sensory awareness; proposing, in this way, a visual pleasure founded in mutuality rather than binary oppositions. It is, indeed, the existential particularity of the narcissistic woman and her various cinematic incarnations, as well as the unique psycho-sensory rapport they each share with the spectator, that this thesis will explore.

In an effort to further analyze the questions of identity and representation evoked by the female star and her audience, the following research will seek an alternative to the dichotomies that tend to characterize the traditional understanding of women in classic Hollywood (that is, spectator/star, narcissistic subject/idealized object; male/female, active/passive). Rather than interpret narcissism as a one-dimensional, monologic preoccupation with one's image, this research posits that representations of the woman's relationship

to the self in this era of Hollywood filmmaking are as multi-faceted as the reflections that surround Phoebe in the finale of *All About Eve*. Uniting the myriad diegetic depictions of the narcissistic woman with the extra-filmic notions of ideality evoked by the unique performers who literally bring her to life on the screen, the following chapters will explore the fluidity of the various existential avenues pursued by a narcissistic subjectivity. Whether the woman deliberately constructs herself as an ideal or depends upon another to complete a vision of perfection; whether she fanatically strives for a supreme state of being or abandons her dreams of self-fulfillment, the narrative narcissists' respective reflections of the idyllic intersects with the star's own maneuvering between the seemingly-static ideality of an iconic persona and the dynamism of an embodied existence. In a continual dialogue between the extra- and intra-diegetic, the singularity of the on-screen figure and the off-screen audience, these shifting expressions of an investment in the self destabilize, rather than affirm, the dichotomies of reality versus ideality, subjectivity versus objectivity.

Focusing upon the materiality of the cinematic image as an affective force that exceeds both the star's surface allure as a Hollywood icon and, in certain instances, complicates the dictates of a narrative trajectory, the subsequent chapters will utilize a theoretical approach that, in a merging of psychoanalysis and phenomenology, reveals the existential complexity of the female

figure: one fluidly negotiating the registers of corporeal reality and ethereal ideality, star persona and diegetic character. In the hopes of highlighting the active engagements – between star and role; spectator, actress, and filmic form itself – inspired by these cinematic entities and their “myths of love,” this work will connect psychoanalytic concerns with Morin’s cultural history of Hollywood, Marks’s theory of haptic visuality, and the phenomenological understanding of film outlined by Sobchack in an exploration of the embodied subjectivities borne by the on-screen Narcissus and her off-screen audience.

I.

Narcissism and Feminist Film Theory: A Theoretical Context¹

¹ Though this section will focus specifically on the question of narcissism in feminist film theory, it would be helpful at this point to consider the basic psychoanalytic structure of the concept – beginning with Freud’s 1914 essay “On Narcissism: An Introduction.” Here, Freud sets forth the notion of an ego-libido, or an investment of energy channeled towards the subject him/herself rather than cathected upon external objects. Freud perceives the foundation of this ego-libido in a universal, primary narcissism experienced by each subject (*SE XIV* 76). In this stage of early life, the infant exists wholly unto him/herself and finds no distinction between his/her own being and the surrounding world; in this phase, there is no way to “differentiate” between “psychical energies” (the libido versus the ego-instincts) as all of these are focused upon the self without being cathected upon an external object (*ibid*). As the individual matures and begins to associate pleasure with the fulfillment of needs (care, feeding), his/her attachment to an original, caring figure may in adulthood translate into what Freud terms an “anaclitic” attachment in love. In this type of object-choice, the subject longs for a relationship based in his/her continuing desire for a partner who provides the gratification of basic needs (88, 90).

Yet, as Freud goes on to remark, certain subjects also engage in a secondary narcissism, or a return to the ego of energy once cathected upon external objects. Freud outlines the various objects of desire appealing to narcissists, stating that they may ultimately develop an attachment to “What he himself is (i.e. himself); what he himself was; what he himself would like to be; someone who was once part of himself [i.e. a child] (90).” For a self-involved subject, then, these entities offer a triumph of the ego-libido; a suffusion of energy towards the actual self, the ideal self (of either the past or future), and/or a child once intrinsic and now external. As Caroline Rupprecht notes, where anaclysis calls for the pursuit of

Before an extensive discussion of this project's particular conceptual approach to feminine narcissism in classic Hollywood cinema, the canonical feminist criticism that has examined the psychoanalytic stakes of the female spectator's identification with the idealized woman on the screen must first be considered. As Teresa de Lauretis posed the question in 1984, "What happens...when woman serves as the looking-glass held up to women?" (6-7) What happens, that is, when an off-screen feminine subjectivity encounters a female ideal reflected within the frame of the cinema screen? In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey transposed the basic elements of the narcissistic paradigm – reflected ideality and the corporeal reality that longs for it – to the context of feminist film

"the object that satisfies our *needs*," narcissism demands "an object that will correspond with our own *ideals*" (emphases mine; 48).

Certainly Freud insists that narcissism and anaclysis represent not a binary "either/or" opposition, but rather two approaches to love available to each individual (88). He does, however, propose that men typically seek a love-object according to the anaclytic mode of desire – whereas women, responding to the limited choice of love-objects as set forth by society, "develop a certain self-contentment" that renders them quintessential narcissists (ibid). These women, usually beautiful, love "only themselves...with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them" (ibid). Though troubling and elusive to a man who loves her, the narcissistic woman may, as Freud relates, nonetheless redeem her self-involved, "enigmatic nature" through devotion to a child who, as a part of herself now made external, inspires object-love (89). In his depiction of this woman, Freud crafts the definitive realization of the narcissistic character: a subjectivity investing in itself as an object of love, removed from the dictates of the *ego ideal* as formed by society (that is, the demands of "the common ideal of a family, a class, or a nation" as integrated into the conscience (102)) while taking itself as *ideal ego* (or the utterly fulfilled self first known in primary narcissism (94)). As Rupprecht remarks, however, the narcissistic woman thus occupies a vexed position in which she is "self-enclosed and at the same time...subject to mirroring, to treating her own self as an object," leading to a state of "confusion" between the interiority of self-image and external, outward appearance (51). Yet even in considering this imbalance, one may suggest that the abiding constant in the narcissistic woman's unsettled identity is the materiality of her body itself – the corporeal presence whose aesthetic impact both grants her the privilege of a societal self-containment and inspires the admiration of others, at the same time as it enables her possible transition to complete object-love through motherhood.

theory in order to analyze the relationship between the star and spectator of classic Hollywood works. Citing Jacques Lacan's conceptualization of the mirror-stage as the model for what she terms the "love affair/despair" between the real spectator and the star on-screen, Mulvey comments upon the way in which the projected image of perfection contrasts the relatively mundane existence of the spectator-subject: "the glamorous impersonates the ordinary" (18).²

² With his theory of the mirror stage of development in the Imaginary register, Jacques Lacan offers an analysis of the often-troubled connection between actual physicality and ideal image. Describing the infant's first glimpse of him/herself in the mirror, Lacan marks this as the fundamental moment of *méconnaissance* between the *je* of reality and the *moi* of ideality. Here, the subject perceives a tableau of fully-realized motor coordination that stands in contrast to his/her inhibited corporeal presence – a defining image of duality from which subsequent, ephemeral visions of the ultimate self, or double, will emerge throughout the subject's lifetime (76). Lacan also remarks that the double of the mirror stage introduces "psychic realities" (77) into the consciousness of the individual, invoking the equally threatening and seductive intertwining of earthly subjectivity and otherworldly ideality.

In this work, Lacan emphasizes the "exteriority" of the ideal, the "mirage" of cohesion that takes form in the reflected self (76). In this conflict between ephemeral imago and material actuality, the overwhelming totality and capacity of the former inspires aggression as well as fascination on the part of the subject. Drawn to and yet resentful of the "mental permanence" and corporeal integrity of the *moi*, the individual often experiences fantasies of fragmentation – scenarios that project the subject's anxious preoccupation with wholeness and disintegration onto the body of the ideal double (76, 78). Destined to fluctuate between the dual poles of physical reality and meta-physical ideality, aggression and passion, the Lacanian subject learns that, as critic Katharine Swarbrick declares in her study of Lacan, "narcissism dictates fragmentation" (8).

Where Freud frames the issue of physicality in relation to the aestheticism of the female narcissist, then, Lacan acknowledges the material form only to place it in destructive thrall to an ideal image. Moreover, if it is the admirer of Freud's narcissistic woman who finds himself vulnerable to her enigmatic inaccessibility, the subject outlined by Lacan endures anguished love for his/her own equally unattainable, illusory self; an affair in which the wholeness of the loved one, that mythical counterpart borne of the individual's very own body, provokes both a passionate attachment and psychic violence. Taken in conjunction, however, Freud and Lacan's respective approaches form a continuum between embodiment and abstraction from which a more cohesive portrait of the narcissistic woman emerges: the actuality of her corporeal presence giving rise to an ethereal ideal comprised of projected representations, an elusive object of desire equally seductive to her own subjective, bodily self and those who love her.

In the context of psychoanalytic film theory, Lacan's mirror stage has offered a fundamental paradigm for understanding the interplay between movie and spectator. In his definitive work *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the*

Yet in the dichotomy posed by Mulvey between the reductive gaze of an active male subject and the passive spectacle of the female object whom he so regards, it is ultimately the male spectator who bears a more intensive narcissistic identification with the on-screen figure.

Aligning his subjectivity with that of the male lead of a given classic Hollywood film, the male viewer finds in the latter an incarnation of an ego-ideal like that imaged in the original mirror-stage (21).

According to Mulvey, this affiliation with the masculine, scopophilic look renders the female star a submissive object defined by her quality of “to-be-looked-at-ness” (26) rather than any subjective agency.³

Cinema, Christian Metz revisits this intertwining between subject and object, or subject-as-object, as he proposes that the spectator relates to the film on the screen as though it were a “shade...phantom...double...a new kind of mirror” (45) of reality. Though he concedes that the spectator is never literally reflected on the screen, Metz attributes the individual’s identification with the film’s characters to his/her ability to recognize his/her like projected in the diegetic world (45). Just as the infant acknowledges his/her status as an object in the mirror, then, the film spectator acknowledges the filmic figure as a removed but nonetheless kindred object that stands before the gaze of the subject. As Metz remarks, “[T]he spectator knows that objects exist, that he himself exists as a subject, that he becomes an object for others: he knows himself and he knows his like” (46).

In related terms, Slavoj Žižek’s books *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (1991) and *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (2001) use Lacanian concepts as a means of analyzing iconic media works and figures: the films of Charlie Chaplin and Alfred Hitchcock, for example, and the *femme fatale* of *film noir*. In so (re)contextualizing familiar elements of Western culture within the language of Lacanian theory, Žižek here explores the psychoanalytic stakes of the relationship between popular media and its audience.

³ In her 1992 work *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic*, Gaylyn Studlar offers a theoretical counterpoint to Mulvey’s model of visual pleasure. Examining the Von Sternberg-Dietrich cycle of films, Studlar focuses upon the cinematic figure of the dominating woman and the spectator’s submission to her gaze – an active look that “asserts presence and power” (48) rather than passive objectification. Placing this paradigm of viewership in the context of the intimate pre-Oedipal union between mother and

In 1981, Mulvey offered “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’...” In this work, she delves deeper into the ways in which a cinema created by and for an active male gaze allows the female spectator to access the masculine aspect of her psyche, repressed since childhood (34). Reading King Vidor’s 1946 film *Duel in the Sun* as an exploration of woman’s “internal oscillation of desire,” Mulvey discusses the complex visual pleasure evoked for the *female* spectator by narratives that allow her to both identify with masculine “action” and briefly abandon the constraints of feminine “passivity” (39). Here, Mulvey initiates a dialogue that leads, intriguingly, to an alternate understanding of feminine narcissistic identification in the cinema. Though she does not explicitly cite Freud’s 1914 essay “On Narcissism,” Mulvey’s analysis nonetheless recalls the essay’s declaration that narcissistic women may “retain the capacity of longing for a masculine ideal...which is in fact a survival of the boyish nature that they themselves once possessed” (*SE XIV* 90). Taken in conjunction, both Freud and Mulvey’s assertions gesture towards the possibility that the male ideal ego of classic cinema is not simply a glorified double for the masculine audience, but a *lost* reflection of the female spectator.

This concern with the oscillation between a masculine and feminine perspective finds further expression in Mary Ann Doane’s

child, Studlar asserts that this masochistic aesthetic evokes an investigation of “a desire...born out of infantile helplessness and the dangerous bliss of symbiosis” (49).

essay on “Film and the Masquerade...” Analyzing the place of the female spectator in relation to the cinematic feminine – that bearer of an “inaccessible though desirable otherness” (18) – Doane places the question of sexual difference in relation to the binary between distance from the image and a psychic proximity to it. Where the male spectator theoretically enjoys a privileged, masterful distance from the woman pictured in the film, the female audience member experiences the image as an oppressive “overpresence” because “she *is* the image” (22); she is the off-screen counterpart, that is, to the on-screen female form. In Doane’s structure of visibility, the female subjectivity finds itself relegated to either a masochistic over-identification with the objectified woman or a narcissistic engagement that calls for the woman to take her own image as the object of her desire (ibid). In order to, in Doane’s terms, “manufacture a distance” between herself and cinematic Woman, then, the woman in the audience must adopt a sense of femininity as masquerade – an awareness of the patriarchal expectations of female identity as “a mask which can be worn or removed” (25).

In her study *The Desire to Desire*, Doane further explores the “hyperbolically intimate relation” (1) between the female spectator and the on-screen feminine, shifting her attention from womanliness-as-masquerade to womanliness-as-product in a consumerist society. Discussing the tendency of women’s films to appeal to the narcissistic aspect of the female psyche, Doane asserts that classic

Hollywood cinema presents an image of ideal femininity which the female spectator covets and to which she aspires. Moving from the “love affair/despair” of the star-spectator rapport as defined by Mulvey, the female subjectivity theorized by Doane experiences a “binding [of] identification [with the cinematic female] to desire” for the perfection she represents (157). In a nexus between materialism and narcissism, Doane’s spectator finds that the on-screen image operates as “both shop window and mirror” (33); that is, an idyllic vision of womanhood in the guise of the star and the accompanying glories – “a car, a house, a room filled with furniture and appliances” (24) – that can belong to the spectator, if only as a reflection of a longed-for reality.

Indeed, Doane links the woman’s “narcissistic apprehension” of the female star and her filmic milieu to a “witness[ing] [of] her own commodification” (24): the film sells the star as a perfect product of femininity, and by engaging with that film the female spectator implicitly condones, even consumes, this impossibly ideal object. As de Lauretis has noted in related terms, the off-screen woman finds herself “doubly bound” as both subject and object to works that “make...her complicit in the production of (her) woman-ness” (15) – rendering her both product and consumer. In a collection of essays entitled *Fetishism and Curiosity*, Mulvey herself recalls Doane’s description of film as “shop window and mirror” in linking the cinema-as-commodity to the equally lucrative

construction of woman-as-spectacular-commodity (8). Exploring the “sexuality of surface,” Mulvey writes of the extravagant allure of cinematic femininity that serves as a means of diverting the male gaze from both the “mechanics of production” and the “lack” borne by the female body itself (14, 13). As she notes in relation to the impact of Marilyn Monroe’s image, the star is valuable and appealing in her role as “a spectacle that holds the eye and distracts it from what should not be seen” (48); that is, classic film crafts a fantastic aesthetic that allows the spectator to avoid the concrete realities of the production process and the human body itself.

To return to de Lauretis’s questioning of “what happens...when woman serves as the looking-glass held up to women,” both Doane and Mulvey offer responses that align reflected, cinematic ideality with the perfection of a feminine product manufactured by a patriarchal society – with the female spectator herself a consumer enabling the success of this project. In so reading the audience as responding to the star’s acquisition value rather than her immediate affect, this direction of feminist criticism characterizes the on-screen woman as an iconic reflection manufactured for and, to recall Mulvey’s terms, “cut to the measure of” a destructive desire. Yet in her most recent work, *Death 24x a Second*, Mulvey analyzes the evolution of the spectator’s desire for proximity to and, indeed, possession of that ideal image. Remarking upon supplementary materials like movie stills and fan magazines as a pre-videotape/DVD

“bridge between” the film and its stars – once approachable only in the actual theatre – and the viewer, she discusses the “illusion of possession” that such products awaken. Yet in the digital capacities of contemporary culture, as Mulvey notes, the ability to actually control (pause, replay, fast-forward) the flow of the film leads to a possessive spectatorship itself; a domination of the filmic figure, whether male *or* female, the force of which lies in the fetishistic (and latently sadistic) fascination of the viewer (161, 166, 171). The surface allure of the female star, the imposition of a patriarchal gaze as borne by the male protagonist – all of these are now, in Mulvey’s words, “subordinated to manipulation and possession” (171).

It is Mulvey’s analysis of the implications of this covetousness for the star’s body, however, that addresses most directly the questions of cinematic materiality and ideality that will inform this project. Examining the balance between animate and inanimate, life and death that haunts cinema itself – the uncanny reawakening, as it were, of a static, dead past through the flow of imagery wherein the photographed entities find new life with each unreeling – Mulvey discusses film’s inherently “blurred boundaries between the living and the not-living” (32). Contained within this often-unsettling exchange, and further controlled by the desires of the possessive spectator, the star is in continual flux within a context of “uncanny fusion between the organic and inorganic, the human body and the machine” (171). In this way, Mulvey sets forth that the

viewer is brought closer to the body of the star only to uncover its performative functions, the stylized gestures and poses that render it a cinematic automaton rather than a lived entity (170).

Yet even as Mulvey explores the *inorganic* quality of the cinematic body, a model in which proximity to the stars therein yields disillusion, she nonetheless illuminates the spectator's utterly organic response to film: the need to approach the ideal, the urge to somehow share in the ecstatic unreeling of the movie. Certainly the spectre of stasis that haunts cinematic imagery – the risk of a pause that will signify, as Mulvey writes, “the human body's mutation from animate to inanimate and vice versa” (176) – speaks to an uncanny aura of death; however, it is that very flux between movement and stillness, life and death, that encapsulates the vicissitudes of the lived experience itself. The body of the star may be perfectly posed and choreographed, with the film directed to correspond with those rhythms, but this stylized occupation of space is also a stylized depiction of existence: an enacting of the human body's potential for precision and poise that is, for all its exactitude, not the exclusive province of eerie automata. In so examining the spectator's wish for “a heightened relation to the human body” as figured in the star (161), Mulvey engages with a notion of co-presence between filmic form and audience that also informs theories of haptic visuality and phenomenology – with the latter approach moving from cinema's

revelation of inevitable death to, as this work will propose, its possibilities for shared life.

Ultimately, in considering the feminist concerns set forth by de Lauretis, Doane, and Mulvey – the female spectator’s myopic absorption in the image-as-commodity as reflected in the cinematic mirror of patriarchal reality; the surface allure of the star; and the fetishistic modes of visual pleasure that disclose either an intrinsically reductive, male gaze or a fragmented, automated star-body – the Hollywood ideal of femininity stands as a symbol of capitalist production and consumption far removed from, to recall Sobchack’s phrase, the “existential particularity” borne by an individual actress or her viewer. As Sobchack has remarked, the metaphorical association between cinema and mirror inspires such commentary highlighting “the totalitarian transcendence of either psychic or ideological structures” while neglecting to consider the agency of individual stars or spectators in their personal relationships to the cinematic form (*Address* 17).

In an effort to discover a reconciliation between the subjective and objective registers of the female star and her audience’s respective experiences, as well as a visual pleasure founded in the interplay between these embodied beings, this project will regard the issues raised thus far by feminist critics as one aspect of an entire spectrum of cinematic experience – a mode complemented by the dialogical engagement between spectator, star, and film proposed by

Marks, Morin, and Sobchack. Moving from these broader concerns with the commodification of “The Star” as a generalized icon and the perpetuation of her surface appeal through her iconic status, the thesis will employ the work of these theorists to examine the *singular* identities of golden-age stars – the discrete embodied experiences of women who share a subjective existence with both their films and their audience. Sobchack has described phenomenology as an “approach [that] seeks...the meaning of experience as it is embodied and lived in context” (*Carnal 2*); and to adopt these terms, the following work will explore the meaning of narcissism, femininity, and classic Hollywood as it is “embodied and lived” in the context of the films themselves.

II.

Embodied Identities: Film, Spectator, and Star

Phenomenology and hapticity

In the early 1990s, the concept of embodiment in the cinema found expression in two key works: Sobchack’s *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of the Film Experience* (1992), and Steven Shaviro’s *The Cinematic Body* (1993). In the latter study, polemical in nature, Shaviro calls for a rejection of psychoanalytic theories of visuality in favor of the spectator’s immediate “masochistic, mimetic, tactile, and corporeal” relationship to a given film (56). Rather than subscribe to traditional structures of power that maintain binaries of sexual difference, subjectivity and objectivity, Shaviro’s approach

demands a surrender to the sensory seduction of the movie – the “passion of disequilibrium and disappropriation” that places the viewer in thrall to an overwhelming cinematic force (60). Yet where Shaviro’s text focuses upon the “excessive intimacy” (54) between film and spectator, Sobchack proposes a dialogical exchange between the two; and it is her phenomenological examination of an interplay founded not in effacement of the self, but in an affirmation of the subjective singularity of both cinematic and human form, that will help shape this project’s concerns with the existential complexity of the rapport between star, film, and spectator.

Sobchack argues that each film should be understood as a viewing subject as well as a viewed object (21 – 22), in this way proposing that the cinematic experience is a symbiotic one between human and filmic subjectivities. Drawing upon the existentialism of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack utilizes the theorist’s process of “reflection turns towards the world as it is *lived*”; his conceptualization, that is, of an intrinsic and continually evolving interaction between an individual subject and surrounding material phenomena (emphasis mine; 27).⁴ Accordingly, Sobchack cites film’s ability to perceive phenomena directly and subsequently convey them to the spectator, who engages with this living medium in an intimate, sensorial relationship. In her assertion of a

⁴ Early in the work, Sobchack aligns herself with the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty rather than the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl – the latter’s focus upon an invariant and irreducible consciousness evoking “charges of idealism and essentialism” (27, 29).

fundamental mode of cinematic subjectivity, Sobchack writes:

“Perceptive, [film] has the capacity for experience; and expressive, it has the ability to signify” (11). A given filmic entity, then, “presents and represents acts of seeing, hearing, and moving as both the *original structures of existential being* and the *mediating structures of language*” (ibid) – the latter in order to convey to the spectator the experience of these perceptions.

In so theorizing the “address” of the film’s discrete “experience of being and becoming” (9), Sobchack reveals the film itself to possess a subjective intelligence existing beyond the vision of the filmmaker. Yet Sobchack also reconciles the autonomy of the filmic force with the creative power of the spectator: For in order to validate these expressions of perception, the spectator must him/herself recognize the film through a means of interpretation and signification that create what Sobchack terms a “dialogical and dialectical engagement” with the film (9, 23). Sobchack’s viewer, then, “shares cinematic space with the film” and, in so doing, “negotiate[s] it, contribute[s] to and perform[s] the constitution of its experiential significance” (10) – and, in so doing, dissolves the binary of viewing-subject and viewed-object in order to allow for a fluid existential connection between him/herself and the film.

The film-as-subject envisioned by Sobchack also provides a context within which the human form may exist as a subject in its own right, a being framed within the greater consciousness of the

film itself. Sobchack proposes that the space of the film itself gains depth and a quality of animation through the active presence of “lived movement” within the frame, in this way standing as “the situation of an existence” (61 – 62); becoming, in other words, the milieu within which the on-screen performer may negotiate the registers of subjectivity and objectivity intrinsic to lived experience. In *Carnal Thoughts*, Sobchack expounds upon the concept of lived-body, defining it as

[A]t once, both an objective *subject* and a subjective *object*: a sentient, sensual, and sensible ensemble of materialized capacities as agency that literally and figurally makes sense of, and to, both ourselves and others. (2)

Exalting the multi-dimensional nature of embodied existence, Sobchack posits a cohesive identity that encompasses seemingly disparate modes of experience – the subjective and objective, literal and figural – while also relating to and reconciling itself with the lived-bodies of others. Through and within that capacious “sensible ensemble” of physicality, the individual is a versatile agent in the surrounding world, interacting with beings of a commensurate existential capaciousness.⁵ For Sobchack, moreover, the film itself

⁵ For a counterpoint to these phenomenological readings, it is worthwhile to briefly remark upon Slavoj Žižek’s psychoanalytic variation on the notion of embodiment in *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (2nd Edition). Framing the figure of the *femme fatale* in *film noir* within a Lacanian context, Žižek recognizes her embodied state only inasmuch as she gives corporeal expression to the “corruption...[and the] inner antagonisms” characterizing the *noir* universe (156). With the male protagonist negotiating a troubled relationship to the paternal force – the interplay that Žižek calls the “true traumatic axis” of the genre – the *femme fatale* stands as merely “a materialization of man’s fall” (155), symptomatic of his vexed existence. As such, the woman dissolves into “a formless, mucous

belongs to this existential community; as she writes in *The Address of the Eye*, each cinematic entity “visually, audibly, and kinetically intends toward the world or toward its own conscious activity in a structure of *embodied* engagement” (285). With these notions of fusion and productive dynamism, Sobchack offers a theoretical model that approaches the on-screen entity not as a mirror manufacturing iconic reflections for the spectator’s consumption, but as another being equally engaged and invested in the material of the world.⁶

With this in mind, David Michael Levin’s essay on phenomenology and narcissism offers a means of further reconciling the ostensibly-opposed self and other. In “Visions of Narcissism,” Levin contends that the process of reflection and self-definition depends not on the Lacanian mirror but on the “structuring of mutual recognition” between individual beings and “of reciprocity, in the mirror of the flesh” (61 – 62) proposed by Merleau-Ponty. Alternately recognizing oneself in and distinguishing oneself from the existential experience of another, and aware of the gaze returned by that other, the individual asserts the subjective force of his/her

slime” upon the male protagonist’s realization of her betrayal; her very presence predicated only upon the man’s validating attentions. This project, however, will go on to examine *noir* films *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven* with a focus upon the ways in which the subjective force (rather than the expendability and dependence upon the male psyche) of the woman’s embodied form actively contributes to the quality of destabilization so intrinsic to the genre.

⁶ In 2009, Jennifer M. Barker published a work on *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*. Expanding upon Sobchack’s notion of the lived-body of film, as well as Laura U. Marks’ analysis of haptic visuality, Barker explores the embodied relationship between film and viewer in terms of an interplay encompassing the skin, musculature, and viscera of each (2 – 4).

own body while perceiving its objective role within this interchange. Narcissism, then, is not simply an isolating juxtaposition between actual self and ideal, ethereal other but a corporeal interaction – what Levin calls a “communion of the flesh” (62) – wherein the body of one negotiates its subjective and objective identity in relation to the presence of another. Self and other are both, in turn, incarnate-reflections engaging in, as Levin writes, “the complex dialectic of individuation and socialization” (48); each exploring the parameters of an embodied identity that simultaneously preserves his/her own existential particularity and allows for a symbiotic fusion with others.

Such an appreciation of the embodied relationship between oneself and one’s surrounding world – whether on or off the screen – finds further enhancement in Laura U. Marks’s exploration of hapticity in cinema.⁷ Examining the possible interchanges between film and spectator in terms of haptic visuality, Marks writes of a perspective that calls for the viewer’s attention and proximity to the texture of the image. Unlike optical visuality – the traditional paradigm that creates a hierarchical distance between the subject of the gaze and its object – hapticity incorporates the sensory capacities (touch, kinesthesia), or “embodied intelligence,” of the spectator into his/her visual comprehension of the image (*Touch* 18). As Marks declares, “[H]aptic perception privileges the material presence of the image” (ibid). Turning her attention from the classical Hollywood

⁷ See *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*.

aesthetic, Marks focuses upon alternative cinematic expressions of cultural and personal identity, works that clearly “encourage a bodily relationship” and “dynamic subjectivity” between the spectator and film (3). Furthermore, Marks briefly comments upon the feminist implications of hapticity. She notes that such an approach, one “more ambient and intimate,” may stand as a “strategy” effective in countering the phallogentric associations of optical visibility (170). Certainly with hapticity’s resistance to the binary schema of psychoanalytic theory – a paradigm that tends to focus upon the woman’s objectification and lack rather than her subjective potential – this approach offers a means of both asserting and heightening the existential singularity of the cinematic entity.

Indeed, the productions of classic Hollywood that will be studied here are not, in fact, so far removed from the emblematic haptic images discussed by Marks. The myriad textures and palettes of golden-age films – the “black-and-white” movies unreeling in shifting tones of opalescence, dense shadows, and dusky grays; and the Technicolor spectacles, in which the chromatic suffusion matches the narrative for dramatic intensity – assert their material presence just as they also declare their own subjective understanding of the world. As Marks declares, a given film does not passively require a validating analysis “in order to deliver forth its meaning” but instead “*means in itself*” (emphasis mine; 145). Truly, Marks and Sobchack theorize a *living*, meaning-ful cinematic experience, ever-evolving in

perceptual discoveries and expressive revelations. Sobchack writes, “With every film we engage, we experience moments of divergence and rupture and moments of convergence and rapture” (*Address* 286); and in so considering the bodies of the Hollywood film, star, and spectator as continually interacting and in-corporating beings, works that once appeared as fantasies of impossible ideality now inhabit and participate in a dynamic world.

It is with this understanding of the intrinsic subjective force of the cinematic entity that the discussion will now turn to the figure of star as analyzed by Morin, a theorist who, in a parallel to Sobchack’s own assertions, once described the symbiotic experience of film as “a system that tends to integrate the spectator into the flow of the film. A system that tends to integrate the flow of the film into the psychic flow of the spectator” (*The Cinema* 102). Presaging the work of Marks and Sobchack by several decades, Morin conceives of a psycho-sensory dialogue between star and spectator that – if far more concerned with the metaphysical elements of cinema than these contemporary scholars – dissolves the binary between subject and object and invites a fluid existential connection between viewer, film, and star.

Morin’s Hollywood⁸

⁸ Though the following discussion will focus on Morin’s reading of the on-screen figure, the broader scholarship of the star has become a flourishing area of film studies. Combining psychology and sociology, star studies examine both the appeal and the institution of “The Movie Star,” using the images and careers of various Hollywood archetypes like Greta Garbo and Marilyn Monroe to examine

In her analysis of hapticity, Marks refers to Bela Balasz, Walter Benjamin, and Dziga Vertov as theorists whose respective concerns with the anthropomorphic power of film, the auratic force of objects, and the “mechanical eye” of the camera provide a basis for contemporary explorations of the embodied cinematic experience (*Skin* 171).⁹ In considering Morin’s own concern with the nexus

the actor or actress in the greater context of Western culture. Where feminist and psychoanalytic film theory tend to treat the star as a collective object of desire for the spectator-subject, star studies engage in analyses of the discrete identities presented by the public and filmic roles of specific Hollywood figures.

The canon of star studies includes works by Charles Affron (looking at the construction of star performance in *Star Acting: Gish, Garbo, Davis*) and Jackie Stacey (surveying the direct, sociological impact of stars on their female fans in *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*); and recently, Jeanine Basinger released *The Star Machine*, a history of the star-system providing analyses of various stars and the trajectories of their careers as plotted by the studio system. Most associated with contemporary star scholarship is Richard Dyer, who offers especially illuminating commentary on the evolution of the star image in studies like *Stars* and *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. Defining the historical and cultural terms that provide the context for the star’s identity as an extra-ordinary figure in society, Dyer sets forth that stars “articulate both the promise and the difficulty that the notion of individuality presents for all of us who live by it” (*Heavenly* 8).

In related works, Amy Lawrence’s study *Echo and Narcissus: Women’s Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* directly transposes the myth of Narcissus and Echo to Hollywood films in an examination of their connections to the legendary paradigm – including, as her discussion of *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950) sets forth, the lore borne of the star system. Avoiding an immersion in the psychoanalytic theory of narcissism in favor of the mythological narrative, Lawrence explores the significance of the woman’s voice in the diegetic relationship between the man-as-Narcissus and woman-as-Echo. Juxtaposing the gendered aural and visual dimensions of the film, Lawrence cites the “dream factory” of studio-era Hollywood as a source producing contemporary retellings of ancient myths.

The first scholars to approach the phenomenon of stardom in terms of mythology, however, were French critics like Roland Barthes, André Bazin, and Morin. Beginning in the 1950s, long before star studies found a place in American and British academic literature, these theorists sought to capture the otherworldly allure of the on-screen figure. In essays like Barthes’s “The Face of Garbo” and Bazin’s “Charlie Chaplin,” the critics maintained the objectivity of cultural distance even as they mused upon the “American dream” so embodied by the film star. In so chronicling the significance of the star as a living legend in popular culture, they crafted the foundation of our contemporary star studies.

⁹ Please see, for example, Balasz’ *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art* (1945); Benjamin’s *Illuminations* (1968); and an anthology of Vertov’s

between psychic investment and sensory resonance, ideality and corporeality, his 1950s writings on stardom and the golden-age of filmmaking¹⁰ arguably grant him a place among those critics cited by Marks. Tracing the construction of the star as an extra-ordinary entity – that is, how the stars *become* “gods and goddesses” of the screen – Morin acknowledges the contrasting forces of real/spectator and ideal/star while theorizing their reconciliation through his concepts of projection-identification and the double; and in this way, his work recalls Lévi-Strauss’s contention that “mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution” (224).

In order to introduce Morin’s understanding of film, it is perhaps best to return to his “myth of love,” a founding myth of star- and fandom that helps to contextualize his approach. In a chapter in *The Stars* entitled “Gods and Goddesses,” Morin attributes the creation of the star to a “process of divinization” (30), one that takes place when the intensity of the spectator’s admiration for and idealization of an actor/actress renders the latter an otherworldly, immortal entity.¹¹ Not merely a cipher assuming the identity of a particular character, the star contributes her own unique physical

works from the 1920s in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (edited by Annette Michelson).

¹⁰ Specifically *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man* (1956) and *The Stars* (1957).

¹¹ In considering Morin’s contention that the woman in film is “the...most idealized...the most adored...She is naturally more of a star than a man” (83), the thesis will from this point use the pronoun “she” when referring to the star in abstract terms.

presence and persona to the filmic role. It is, accordingly, the successful merging of diegetic character and the actress's personage that so enraptures the audience and creates the "myth of the star" (30) – a compelling figure borne of the intersection between narrative situation and extra-narrative personal and corporeal attributes. Morin elucidates the transcendent process through which the fan's emotional and psychological attachment grants divinity to the stars:

Love is in itself a divinizing myth: to love passionately is to idealize and to adore. In this sense, all love is a mythic fermentation. The heroes of the movies assume and magnify the myth of love. They purify it of the dross of daily life and bring it to its full flower. The great lovers rule the screen, focusing love's magic on themselves, investing their interpreters with divinizing virtues; they are created to love and be loved, to fasten on themselves that immense affective surge that constitutes the participation of the spectator. The star is above all an actress or an actor who becomes the subject of the myth of love, to the point of instigating a veritable cult. (30)

In this passage, Morin explicates the central themes that guide his work: The "dross of daily life" with which the spectator contends and the star transcends; the intertwining of the body of the actress and her divinized star presence ("The star is above all an *actress*..."); and the sheer psycho-sensory force of the exchange between spectator and star ("that immense affective surge"). Emphasizing a productive convergence ("created to love and be loved") rather than a polarization of experience, Morin posits a dual investment between star and spectator that renders the on- and off-screen realms mutually dependent.

Of course, in the romance between star and audience outlined here, the former appears as a supreme narcissist “focusing love’s magic on [herself]”; that is, the star exists by and for the force of passion borne by the spectator. Indeed, later in *The Stars* Morin goes on to define the relationship between star and spectator as founded in the same inherent sense of “inequality” that underlies religious love, in which “adoration...is not reciprocal but eventually recompensed” (60). Yet even if the viewer does not achieve the level of reverential admiration afforded to the star, s/he nonetheless maintains an essential agency: the process of projection-identification – the “immense affective surge” – that grants life to the star’s divine identity. Morin defines projection-identification as the means through which the animation and spirit of the spectator render the star on-screen an *animated*, *spirited* being. He remarks that in and of themselves, the figures within a film represent mere “games of shadows and light” (*The Cinema* 91); it is through the spectator’s ability to project his/her knowledge of the phenomena of the extradiegetic world onto the diegetic world that the latter may be recognized as a reality unto itself, one with which the audience thus identifies (91). He writes:

The objectivity of the world of cinema needs our *personal* participation to take shape and essence. This luminous pulverulence on the screen is like powdered plasmas, which, before having water added to them, are only dust...This world needs our substance in order to live...[The figures on-screen] live a life that is drawn from us. They have taken our souls and our

bodies, have adjusted them to their size and their passions. (148)

The process of projection-identification, then, bespeaks not merely a suspension of disbelief on the part of the spectator but also an utter devotion of self. In his/her desire to produce and subsequently engage with the transcendent world of film, the spectator must essentially share his/her experience of life to grant life. As Morin writes of the desire that gives rise to the figure of the double, “Man...has always projected in his own image...his need to transcend himself in life and death” (*Stars* 82); and if, as declared above, this cinematic “world needs our substance in order to live,” then the viewer needs its divine immortality in order to believe in his/her own. In a radical shift from what Sobchack calls the “damning” psychoanalytic metaphor of the screen as a mirror, a reflection of the viewer revealing only “his or her subjection to signs and meanings produced by an always already dishonest and subjugating ‘other’” (*Address* 17), Morin interprets cinema as a medium of experience – a channel of existence allowing a dialogue between natural and *supernatural* possibilities. To apply Sobchack’s terms to Morin’s reading, then, the interplay of “perception and expression” between cinematic and human being introduces the potential for an engagement with the metaphysical.

Altering in this way the classic model of the relationship between the spectator and the star, a paradigm reliant on the binary of

narcissistic subject/idealized object, Morin presents a spectator-star dynamic characterized by a cycle of what could be termed productive narcissism: That is, the spectator-subject invests part of him/herself into the world of the film in order to create an ideal double, a divine subject in her own right, one inspiring the love that the spectator would wish for him/herself. Rather than a commodity manufactured for the masses by the idle fantasies of a patriarchal society, the ideal double described by Morin is representative of what he terms “the construction of man *by* man” (emphasis mine; *The Cinema* 26) – the once-abstract longing for immortality finding realization, given substance, through the materiality of the star and her cinematic milieu.¹² And though the double does not directly return this love to the spectator, the latter nonetheless (re)appropriates that affective investment through fanatic devotion and the fulfillment (as transferred to the star) of his/her wish to transcend the exigencies of the quotidian. Truly, the “magic” of Morin’s myth of love lies in the power of the real spectator to create the ideal.

For all of this focus upon questions of the transcendent – the exploration of the “veritable transfers [that] take place between the soul of the spectator and the spectacle on the screen” (*Cinema* 95) – Morin maintains an equally profound interest in the significance of

¹² In his 1919 essay on “The Uncanny” in literature, Freud describes the double as a distinctly *unheimlich* entity that signifies a “doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self” (*SE XVII* 234 - 235). Though Morin does not explicitly reference Freud’s discussion, his own analysis of the phenomenon nonetheless directly recalls that of his predecessor: Both Freud and Morin examine the double as the product of a human subjectivity desiring immortality, and each remarks upon the sinister qualities that can underlie the magic of the double.

the embodied experience. Early in *The Stars*, he notes that the star must reconcile the dual forces of her otherworldly aura and the corporeal form from which it emanates; as he phrases it, “the confrontation of myth and reality, appearance and essence” (48) underlies the existence of the star. To recall Morin’s explication of the myth of love, “the star is above all an actress,” a human figure whose physical beauty inspires the audience’s association with an ethereal double¹³: As Morin declares, “[T]he mythic projections focus on the concrete and actual person” (82). In order to awaken these mythical associations, however, the actress must undergo processes of make-up and costuming that “raise...daily beauty to the level of a superior, radiant...beauty” (34), in this way drawing forth the ideal from the basic attributes of a given corporeal form. Morin also discusses the various technical elements of studio-era filmmaking – camera angles, lens-filters, and lighting – that heighten the star’s cinematic impact. Working in tandem to craft an image of extraordinary beauty from the material presence of the actress, inviting the spectator to, as Morin writes, “invest...the real actor with magic potentialities” (82), these techniques render the human being a preternaturally compelling entity. In a variation on Mulvey’s concept

¹³ In a chapter entitled “The Stellar Liturgy,” Morin analyses the commercialization of the star as her image is used to sell various merchandise – perfumes, toiletries, cigarettes – to a public eager to consume objects associated with the on-screen ideal. As Morin focuses on the star’s endorsements of *extra*-filmic commodities, however, his discussion presents a more sociological context than the film-theoretical one engaged with here.

of the “to-be-looked-at-ness” of the female star, Morin describes a phenomenon that could be termed a “*must*-be-looked-at-ness.”

Certainly Morin’s attention to the cosmetic and technical enhancements of the star’s form brings to mind Mulvey’s commentary on the “sexuality of surface”; yet instead of signifying the artificial, a distraction from the “lack” of the female form, here maquillage and cinematic technique enable a “unique synthesis” (ibid) between the materiality of that figure and its aesthetic potential. Furthermore, in considering Sobchack’s assertion of the filmic entity’s intrinsic embodied identity, one may regard classic Hollywood cinema’s approach to the human form as expressive of a complex subjectivity defined not by binary oppositions – the synthetic versus the natural – but rather by the complex interplay between corporeal actuality and cinematic enhancement. Just as the “concrete and actual person” of the actress gives rise to the ideal double of humanity existing on the screen, a wholly mechanical system functions to produce a transcendent affect. Ultimately an experience as sensual as it is meta-physical, Morin’s cinema does not divide the real and the ideal but celebrates their rapturous embrace.

Uniting Morin’s psycho-sensory appreciation of the star with Marks and Sobchack’s respective theories of an embodied cinematic experience, then, the discussion will now turn to the corpus of the thesis. Guided by an overarching concern with the Sobchackian “existential particularity” of the stars and their films, the following

section will set forth the theoretical issues provoked by and the historical context surrounding this selection of Hollywood figures – and, as well, address the notion of the interplay between star persona and diegetic character, and the role of genre in the crafting of the classical-era cinematic Narcissus.

III.

The Corpus in Context

Star and role

Just as Morin theorizes an interaction between the spectator and the star, he also perceives an active intersection between the star and the role she portrays. In *The Stars*, he writes that “the transferences of actor to character and of character to actor signify neither total identification nor actual duality... The actor does not engulf his role. The role does not engulf the actor” (29). Instead of a complete sublimation of persona to the demands of a diegetic character, the star participates in a process of “osmosis” (29) that signals an interplay with the role rather than an immersion therein; a reflexive exchange in place of a monologic absorption from one self into an other. As Richard Dyer offers in his critical perspective on the issue of star and role, the myriad diegetic identities an actress may assume throughout her career do not fundamentally alter the “one flesh and blood person [who] is embodying them all” (*Heavenly* 10). Instead, the audience’s awareness of the star’s continual re-

presentation is, as Dyer continues, “sufficient to suggest that there is a coherence behind” it (ibid).

The golden-age cinematic Narcissus, then, engages with her narrative reflection yet maintains the integrity of her corporeal self. As Morin declares, “The star is more than an actor incarnating characters, he incarnates *himself in them*, and they become incarnate in him” (28)¹⁴; thus embodied presence and abstract character unite to form a cohesive cinematic entity. To return to Sobchack’s description of film as the “situation of an existence,” the movie in which the star performs becomes the context within which she negotiates the depth of her own on-screen existence as both an actual presence and a fictional figure. In the following chapters, the thesis will adopt this understanding of the nuanced dialogue between extra-diegetic persona and diegetic role, exploring the ways in which the identity of the star as an extra-filmic individual complements and/or complicates both her performance of a character and her immediate, embodied affect in the subjective expression that is the film itself. Indeed, in analyzing stars and roles often considered interchangeable – Rita Hayworth and *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1944), Bette Davis and Margo Channing, Marilyn Monroe and Lorelei Lee from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Howard Hawks, 1953) – the research will

¹⁴ Stephen Heath also notes, “The image [of the star] can determine the narrative construction of a film...films are developed as ‘vehicles,’ ‘showcases’ for this or that star” (181-182). Examining the idea of the star vehicle, however, requires a more expressly historically-oriented discussion than the one this thesis will present; see Richard Dyer’s *The Stars* (70 – 71) for a brief analysis of the star vehicle.

acknowledge the preconceptions, even expectations, evoked by a particular star's persona/cultural "legend" while further exploring the dynamic lived experience of the film that reveals her unique existential evolution.

A note on Hollywood history and genre

In terms of this project, the stars and roles explored exist within a chronology spanning roughly from 1940 to 1960, in this way framing the studio-era from its height to its decline and, moreover, capturing a particular historical juncture in the spectator's relationship to the star. From its inception, Hollywood has dealt with the relationship between the physical reality of the actress and her ethereal appeal; indeed, Morin marks the shift from silent movies to talking pictures in 1927 as a moment in which the distant gods and goddesses of the silents became humanized through the relative realism of the talkie. Accordingly, the 1930s represent a decade of transition, for with this sense of realism came an attention to the quotidian – a concern with refiguring the star not as what Morin calls the "marble idol" of the silent tradition but as a force uniting "the ideal and the everyday" (14), more closely resembling the mortals populating her audience.¹⁵

¹⁵ Considering that this thesis pursues the destabilization rather than affirmation of binary oppositions, it should be reiterated that the shift from silents to talkies represents a complex process of transformation in stardom rather than an abrupt disjuncture between epochs. For instance, a figure like Marlene Dietrich appeared in sound pictures as a direct descendent of the preternaturally stylized silent-era stars; and an actress like Norma Shearer retained the silent cinema's more theatrical style of acting even in her sound films in the 1930s. The question, then, is not so much of "static silent-icon *versus* complex talkie-star," but rather the ways in

In more specific historical terms, the beginning of the 1930s also found Hollywood bounded by the constraints of the Production Code Administration – an organization that set forth dictates of censorship determining the moral tone of cinematic works throughout the classical age. In 1934, following a religious backlash against the alleged excess of sex and violence represented on the screen in the 1920s and early 30s, the PCA (led first by Will Hays, and then Joseph Breen) declared that in Hollywood productions “the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, or sin,” and insisted upon “moral retribution” for criminal characters and other diegetic transgressors of the Administration’s ethics (in Schatz 167, 203 – 204). In so placing the narrative character in thrall to an insidious set of restrictions, the Code also attempted to control the appeal of the star who embodied that character – in this way seeking to inhibit, for instance, the sensuality of actresses like Jean Harlow by holding their diegetic counterparts to the strictures of the moral code.¹⁶

Ultimately, by the beginning of the 1940s the almost supernatural aloofness of early stars gradually gave way to a more

which the figure of the star gained a kind of existential momentum through the revolutionary revitalization wrought by talking pictures. Those stars “born” into sound cinema benefited from its enhanced sensory dimensionality, with the continuing dynamism of technological/stylistic innovations within the filmic body evoking the dynamism of the star’s own lived-body. Though these particular historical notions would be refined and better explored in future research, the concept of a kind of “evolutionary” stardom – with, for instance, Garbo ceding to Hepburn, Hayworth to Monroe – informs the selection of stars surveyed here.

¹⁶ The Code’s dictate on “scenes of passion,” for example, illustrates this demand for constrained sensuality: “Excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures, are not to be shown” (in Leff and Simmons 285).

approachable female star who, even if she remained a goddess, at least had a tangential relationship with the earthly plane: The platinum eroticism of Harlow ceded to the cheerful charm of a Betty Grable; Norma Shearer's distant elegance found its counterpart in the serene warmth of an Ingrid Bergman. The co-starring of Greta Garbo and Joan Crawford in 1932's *Grand Hotel* (Edmund Goulding), as well, presaged this evolution. Juxtaposing the majesty of Garbo with the working-girl glamour of Crawford, this film hinted at the evolution taking place in a Hollywood moving from the inaccessible to the (relatively) attainable. Appropriately enough, a speech from Garbo's *Queen Christina* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1933) describes this humanizing process, as the queen laments her position as a "symbol":

All my life, I have been a symbol. A symbol is eternal, changeless, an abstraction. A human being is mortal and changeable, with desires and impulses, hopes and despairs. I'm tired of being a symbol...I long to be a human being.

Ironically, Garbo herself eschewed the very humanization desired by her *Queen Christina*. Retiring in 1941, Garbo became a reclusive legend who, as Morin states in *The Stars*, found herself "too big for a cinema that had grown too small...[H]er mystery and solitude permit us to measure the evolution that has taken place" (9). In this way, Garbo stands as an archetype of a different era, a figure associated with a static iconicity rather than a developing existence.

Those actresses that did evolve, however, highlight the various engagements continually taking place in the cinematic

experience: the dialogue between the embodied subjectivities of spectator, film, and star; the osmosis between star and role – as well as the founding interplays between the corporeal and ethereal, real and ideal that define narcissism.¹⁷ Surveying a series of stars and films that complicate the notion of ideality rather than present it as an existential *fait accompli* – and, furthermore, subvert the constraints of Code-era productions with the vitality of their material impact – this research will approach the following cinematic bodies as evolving subjects of dynamic expression. The study begins with Katharine Hepburn’s roles in the comedies *The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor, 1940) and *Woman of the Year* (George Stevens, 1942), examining the ways in which the actress invites an alternative vision of both romantic love and film itself with her destabilization of conventions of stardom and female ideality. The following chapter, discussing Joan Crawford in *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945) and Gene Tierney in *Leave Her to Heaven* (John M. Stahl, 1945), will utilize René Girard’s theory of the mimetic crisis to explore the relationship between self and double both in the melodramatic narratives and in the extra-diegetic balance of star and co-star.

¹⁷ In terms of counterpoints, a star like Lana Turner arguably stands in contrast to these more complex figures of the classical era. Though she appeared in films of various genres (musicals, *film noir*, melodrama) throughout her lengthy career, the placidity of her embodied cinematic presence – her classically beautiful features often appearing more statue-esque than vital, her acting range somewhat limited – renders her a more conventional icon of ideality associated with golden-age Hollywood than the stars discussed here. Indeed, Chapters III and IV will refer to Turner as a “compare/contrast” figure in relation to the stars analyzed therein. Yet though Turner does not support the particular approach of this project, Richard Dyer offers an illuminating reading of her career as a whole in the article “Lana: Four Films of Lana Turner” (in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, edited by Marcia Landy).

Chapter IV will then turn to a comparison of four Rita Hayworth films – *Cover Girl* (Charles Vidor, 1944), *Gilda*, *Down to Earth* (Alexander Hall, 1947), and *Lady from Shanghai* (Orson Welles, 1948) – in a study of the sensory impact wrought by the intertwining of her unique kinetic presence and the lived-body of cinema itself. Turning from the height of the studio-era to its demise, Chapter V will employ M.M. Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope to explore the “performance time” of a Hollywood in transition, inhabited by idols Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard* and *All About Eve*’s Bette Davis and Anne Baxter. Finally, the concluding chapter will link Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* and Girard’s alternative interpretation of the narcissistic woman in a reading of Marilyn Monroe’s cinematic evolution in *Don’t Bother to Knock* (Roy Ward Baker, 1952), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *Bus Stop* (Joshua Logan, 1957), and *The Misfits* (John Huston, 1961).

The incarnations of femininity so represented reveal Hollywood’s Narcissus to be an entity of near-infinite variety – a figure moving between genres as diverse as romantic comedy and *film noir*, musicals and melodramas. Though a number of the diegetic characters discussed here find their bases in roles typical to their respective generic conventions – the eccentric heiress of romantic screwball comedies and the *femme fatale* of *noir*; the showgirl of musical tradition and the self-sacrificing mother of melodrama – the performances of the stars themselves and the *élan*

vital of their material impact complicate narrative exigencies and expectations. It should be noted, then, that the following chapters will engage with questions of genre inasmuch as they relate directly to the given star herself – for example, how does Tierney’s remarkable photogenic impact in *Leave Her to Heaven* unsettle the audience’s notion of a *femme fatale*? In what ways does Monroe’s burgeoning screen persona offset the sensationalist melodrama of *Don’t Bother to Knock*? Just as the research focuses on the embodied force of the cinematic entity (both film and star) to alternately destabilize and transcend conventions of spectatorship, it will also examine the unique interplay between these beings and the norms of classic Hollywood filmmaking.

As Phoebe’s moment before the mirror in *All About Eve* so eloquently expresses, female narcissism in classic Hollywood film signifies not a myopic self-absorption but a pursuit of and investment in the interplay between material actuality and projections of possibility. Though representations of the woman’s relationship to the ideal shift from a given star, role, and film to another, each nonetheless negotiates the parameters of subjectivity and objectivity in her encounters with – to recall Queen Christina’s monologue – “desires and impulses, hopes and despairs.” Transposing the communion of the flesh of which Levin wrote to the cinematic experiences created by the embodied engagements between the film, star, and spectator, the subsequent discussions will regard the screen

not as a looking-glass of ephemeral reflections, but a medium of shared experience.

Chapter II

Redefining the Ideal: Katharine Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story* (1941) and *Woman of the Year* (1942)

I.

Early in George Cukor's *The Philadelphia Story*, after Macaulay "Mike" Connor (James Stewart) first meets the overwhelmingly vivacious Tracy Lord (Katharine Hepburn), he turns to a friend in exasperation and demands, "Can she be human?" The delivery of the line as a simple aside belies its significance; for within the context of both *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year* (directed by George Stevens), two films in which Katharine Hepburn portrays heroines extraordinary in their respective natures and circumstances, this question stands as a concern guiding both the extra- and intra-diegetic dimensions of the works. Indeed, with the tension between humanity and ideality underlying the depiction of the actress and her characters, *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year* stand as meta-commentaries examining the dynamic relationship between the woman-as-star and the spectator who both contributes to and believes in the former's aura of ideality. Intertwined with these notions of feminine perfection, moreover, is the exploration of another ideal: that of traditional romantic love as set forth by classic Hollywood.

In *The Philadelphia Story*, Hepburn plays a headstrong socialite living a charmed life of romantic misadventures on the Main Line of Philadelphia; and in *Woman of the Year*, she portrays Tess

Harding, a world-famous journalist who must divide her devotion between her career and her marriage. Claiming their identities as exceptional incarnations of womanhood, both Tracy and Tess engage in a process of self-divinization as their fascination with their own images matches the admiration of those around them. Through the machinations of the male protagonists, however, the narratives of the works seek to reveal the flesh-and-blood humanity belied by the women's otherworldly appeal, insisting – in implicit response to the question, “Can she be human?” – that the heroines forsake a narcissistic investment in their own ideality for an attachment to a man.

In two cinematic universes in which humanity betokens the assumption of the role of nurturing wife and helpmate, and ideality is synonymous with stubborn egocentrism, the romantic relationship between man and woman achieves near-mythic status as a redemptive force saving the diegetic heroine from the perils of self-love. Yet with Katharine Hepburn embodying the identities of these women, the films transform from absolute neo-fairy tales to more ambiguous envisionings of the role of the woman in a “happy marriage.” Bearing an inherent challenge to the stereotypes of femininity and beauty associated with the extra-diegetic figure of the movie star, Hepburn's unsettling presence reverberates in *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year* as a force also complicating the notion of traditional romance expressed within the

narratives. A force, furthermore, that invites the audience not to simply suspend its disbelief but to engage in an alternative romance – one of visual pleasure, borne of the nexus between on- and off-screen subjectivities in this deliberate dual examination of the woman-as-star and her embodied alliance with her male co-stars.

Hepburn, Hollywood, and visuality

The extra-diegetic relationship between Hepburn and the spectator has consistently presented a complicated love affair, due in large part to the star's enigmatic persona. Now considered an icon of intellectual elegance, at the beginning of her career in the 1930s Hepburn stood as an unconventional beauty amidst the more traditional glamour embodied by stars like Claudette Colbert, Jean Harlow, and Norma Shearer. In screwball comedies like *Bringing Up Baby* (Howard Hawks, 1938) and *Holiday* (Cukor, 1938) (starring in both films opposite Cary Grant), Hepburn portrayed heroines who – whether in their outright eccentricity or reluctance to conform – challenged patriarchal expectations of womanhood. Further complicating her presence on-screen was Hepburn's air of androgyny, the quintessential representation of which being her eponymous role in Cukor's *Sylvia Scarlett* (1935). Highlighting her sexual ambiguity, Hepburn (co-starring again with Grant) plays a devoted daughter who poses as a young man in order to join her thieving father as he escapes the authorities. Though the film failed commercially upon its release, it nonetheless endures as a work

designating Hepburn as the successor to the type of sexuality embodied by Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo – that deliberate manipulation of the norms of masculinity and femininity that reveals gender to be, as Judith Butler maintains, merely a construct of a “stylized repetition of acts” (179) designed to create the illusion of a cohesive gendered identity within “the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality” (180).¹⁸



Hepburn in *Sylvia Scarlett*.

In his comprehensive and illuminating study on Hepburn, Andrew Britton draws a direct comparison between Hepburn and Garbo in the 1930s, noting that though the sexual ambiguity of the latter represents an ideal vision of “the phallic mother” or “androgynous goddess” (103), Hepburn’s unusual presence introduces an element of defiance against the traditional, patriarchal

¹⁸ For an in-depth analysis of the sociological implications of Dietrich, Garbo, and Hepburn’s appeal, see Andrea Weiss’s article “‘A queer feeling when I look at you’: Hollywood Stars and Lesbian Spectatorship in the 1930s.” Also, it is worthwhile to recall Andrew Britton’s clarification on the point of gender ambiguity in stars like Dietrich, Garbo, and Hepburn: “This is not to say...that the star-as-person was gay or bisexual, but that certain dominant traits of the *persona* are strikingly out of true with dominant social norms of femininity” (*Katharine Hepburn* 85).

conceptions of womanhood. Britton proposes that where the close-up captures the unquestionable beauty of Garbo's face and thus redeems the "non-femininity" of the star, close-ups of Hepburn only serve to further isolate those elements that comprise her sometimes unsettling visage (30). Though sharing with Garbo the symmetry of features and intensity of gaze, Hepburn's face bears none of her contemporary's inherent serenity and seems, instead, to willfully call upon the spectator's utter acceptance or rejection of its extreme contours. As Britton comments, a binary opposition dominates descriptions of Hepburn: She is considered either "beautiful" or "plain" (37).



Garbo



Hepburn

At this juncture, it would be helpful to turn to Roland Barthes's essay on "The Face of Garbo" as a means of both extending Britton's comparison and contextualizing Hepburn's place in the canon of female stars. Examining the appeal of one of Hollywood's greatest stars, the essay explores how the real features of the actress's

visage unite with the ethereal dimension of her persona to create the impact of her on-screen presence. Barthes maintains that Garbo's legendary appellation, "The Divine," refers not so much to the beauty of her face but to "the essence of her corporeal person, descended from a heaven where all things are formed and perfected in the clearest light" (56-57). In this way, Barthes's conception of Garbo founds itself on the notion of the star as an intersection between the (corpo)real and the ideal – and even more, how the real, projected on-screen, appears to the spectator as the ideal:

Garbo still belongs to that moment in cinema when capturing the human face still plunged audiences into the deepest ecstasy, when one literally lost oneself in a human image as one would in a philtre, when the face represented a kind of absolute state of the flesh, which could be neither reached nor renounced (56).

Through Garbo's face, Barthes's spectator becomes aware of a state of perfection unattainable in reality, a "deepest ecstasy" of completion envisioned through the cinema and its stars. In that "absolute state of the flesh" (56), then, Garbo's countenance represents a divine beauty recognizable to, but beyond the reach of, the mortal spectator.

Establishing the foundation for Britton's interpretation of Garbo's androgyny, Barthes goes on to relate the sexually "undefined" quality of Garbo's face to a "Platonic Idea of the human creature" (56), a supreme realization of the potential of the physical form. Where Garbo's beauty is absolute, however, Hepburn's is in flux, inspiring not an immersion therein but an interrogation of its

destabilizing fluidity between masculine and feminine sensibilities – a fluidity that liberates Hepburn from the restricting patriarchal framework of gender identities written of by Butler. Yet the appeal of both Garbo and Hepburn bears more implications than merely challenging notions of sexual difference; indeed, both women affect larger questions of cinematic aesthetics and the spectator's relationship to such Hollywood visions of beauty.¹⁹ As Barthes declares near the conclusion of his essay,

Garbo's face represents this fragile moment when the cinema is about to draw an *existential* from an *essential* beauty, when the archetype leans towards the fascination of *mortal* faces...(emphases mine; 57)

In this way, Barthes comments upon Garbo's place in the transitional period of stardom that so fascinates Edgar Morin, that process of humanization undergone by the theretofore supernaturally affecting stars (*Stars* 15). If, as Barthes maintains, Garbo belongs to this moment of transition, then Hepburn stands as its product: the on-screen counterpart to a mortal woman's lived-body. For in engaging with Hepburn's face, the spectator must engage with the concept of beauty rather than, as with Garbo, accept it as an absolute truth.

Barthes writes that Garbo's face "was not to have any reality except

¹⁹ Certainly Dietrich would represent a figure equally compelling in relation to Hepburn; yet with the Dietrich of the 1940s so irrevocably associated with the *oeuvre* of director Josef von Sternberg, Garbo – one of Metro-Goldwyn Mayer's greatest stars – stands as an especially apt point of comparison with fellow MGM-actress Hepburn in terms of a more conventional studio-era aesthetic. For further reading on Dietrich's significance, please see Gaylyn Studlar's *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic*.

that of its perfection” (57); Hepburn’s face, however, provokes an exploration of the reality *of* such on-screen perfection.

Barthes goes on to grant attention to what Morin describes as the “tactile voluptuousness” (*Stars* 145) of Garbo’s image, writing more of her enchanting “absolute state of the flesh” (56). Describing the visage of Garbo’s *Queen Christina* as an expanse of snow from which the “faintly tremulous wounds” (ibid) of her eyes emanate, Barthes provides a context within which to frame Martine Beugnet’s conceptualization of the “body-landscape” of a given image – that “suspended moment of undifferentiation” in which the human form represents simply another element of texture within the shot rather than a symbol of gender or cultural ideals of beauty (30). In so removing the star from the exigencies of time and space and placing her instead within a purely sensual aestheticism, both Barthes and Beugnet offer theoretical support to the concept of haptic visuality analyzed by Laura U. Marks.

As set forth in the introduction, the haptic eye engages with the surface and texture of an image, moving across the planes of a cinematic form with the intention to “graze” rather than gaze, thus establishing an inter-subjective dialogue between image and viewer (*Skin* 162, 188). Such a process finds its parallel in Sobchack’s contention that the viewer “shares cinematic space with the film” and, in so doing, “negotiate[s] it, contribute[s] to and perform[s] the constitution of its experimental significance” (*Address* 10). Through

this approach to cinema, evoking the spectator's complete sensorial investment in the world of the film, dichotomies of aesthetic appraisal ("beautiful" or "plain") and gendered characteristics (masculine or feminine) find resolution and suspension. In this way, and as this chapter will go on to relate, the classic Hollywood star – one as classically beautiful as Garbo or as provocative as Katharine Hepburn – bears a cinematic impact founded in the constellation of, rather than binary between, on- and off-screen subjectivities.

Resisting the dominant fiction

In turning again to the narratives of *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year* and examining their *dénouements*, one must move beyond the acceptance of the "happy ending" as such and recognize the greater meta-narrative framework that provides their context; that is, the cultural screen through which the films are viewed. In *The Threshold of the Visible World*, Kaja Silverman details the significance of Lacan's concept of the screen, that opaque construction akin to the seminal reflection of the mirror stage in its function as an "image or cluster of images through which [the subject] is culturally apprehended" (18). A product of the patriarchal gaze that defines the perspective of society – with the camera serving as its most direct incarnation – the screen operates as a mediating force, one that influences both how and what the subject perceives of the world (18, 134 – 135). As Silverman writes in a related discussion, such constructions allow ideology to take shape as a

“collective mirror...[that] depicts the surrounding environment, the *vraisemblance* which the...subject inhabits” (*Male Subjectivity* 24).

In similar terms, the screen could be said to receive the projections of what Silverman terms the “dominant fiction” of culture, or the prevailing ideas and ideals that constitute “what passes for reality in a given society” (*Threshold* 178). For Silverman, the dominant fiction founds itself on the opposition between masculinity and femininity; the equating of the penis with the phallus; and the “central signifier” of the family – all notions whose constancy helps to perpetuate perceptions of race, class, and gender (178 – 179). In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, Silverman further comments upon the various media of popular culture – “images and stories...cinema, fiction...and other forms of mass representation” – that, in myriad incarnations of Lacan’s screen, find inspiration within and serve as tools of this founding ideological myth (30).²⁰ As a pervasive narrative that perpetuates the normative conventions of society, the dominant fiction provides a system of meaning from which individuals draw the definition of their sexual identity, understanding the parameters of desire and gendered behavior in relation to the tenets of tradition (41).

Viewed through an awareness of the cultural screen that produces the dominant fiction, the narratives of both *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year* come to represent less

²⁰ Here, Silverman references Jacques Rancière’s formulation of the dominant fiction.

emblems of Utopian romance than productions representative of its very mythic nature. With a contemporary understanding of feminist thought and practice, it becomes all the more difficult to unequivocally accept a diegetic universe in which the female subject only ascends to the status of, to quote Tracy's once-and-future husband in *The Philadelphia Story*, "a first-class" woman and human being upon abandoning her own visions of ideality in deference to the wishes of the man in her life. Yet just as Hepburn herself defies traditional conceptions of stardom, the visual pleasure she evokes allows for a kind of egress from the deliberate imposition of ideological tenets that both extend to and shape the structure of the narratives. Though the conclusions of the films find the heroines accepting these tenets rather than continuing to challenge them, an *embodied* approach to the relationship between screen and film allows the viewer to affect the *abstract* screen by which these narratives were produced and through which they were apprehended.

In *The Address of the Eye*, Sobchack describes the screen as an animate entity upon which the life of the film enacts itself. As the film-as-subject shifts in time and place, the screen presents the "fleshly boundaries" that unify these perceptions and expressions by offering the frame of the film its definitive spatial context (210, 211). In so moving from the abstract screen of cultural impositions towards the meaning of the physical screen itself, one comes closer to appreciating film as a sensual perceptive experience – a body both

projected upon and contained within the flesh of the screen, inviting the spectator to literally make sense of it (to adopt Sobchack's terms) rather than make peace with it. Haptic visuality, by extension, enhances the spectator's material awareness of cinema; as Marks asserts, this perspective allows for a "respect for otherness, and concomitant loss of self in the presence of the other" (*Touch* 20). That is, the audience's recognition of the film's corporeal subjectivity leads to an interaction with rather than an isolation from the projected world.

In language that counters the subject/object dichotomy in optical visuality, as well as the notion of male/female roles within the dominant fiction, Marks goes on to describe the fleshly rapport as an "erotic" relationship between film and viewer: It "is an elastic, dynamic movement, not the rigid all-or-nothing switch between an illusion of self-sufficiency and a realization of absolute lack" (ibid). In considering Hepburn's pairings with both Cary Grant and Spencer Tracy in *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year*, respectively, the "elastic, dynamic" nature of the couples' visual impact – in contrast to the "all or nothing" resolutions presented by the narratives – offer a romantic cinematic alternative to the constraints of the dominant fiction. With Hepburn's presence enhanced through the chemistry of her fluid interaction with Grant and Tracy, these unions represent altogether different love stories for the on- and off-screen entities than those proposed by the diegetic

trajectory. With this understanding, the introduction of a haptic appreciation of these classic films presents both an alternative mode of visual pleasure and a further means of resistance against the supremacy of the dominant fiction and its implicit phallo-centrism. In re-viewing these films with a phenomenological appreciation, Hepburn, Grant, and Tracy evolve from signifiers of the fraught relationship between femininity and masculinity to inhabitants of – body-landscapes within – the flesh of the film as it is projected on the screen.

At the end of his essay, Barthes compares Garbo to another legendary Hepburn: Audrey. Drawing the distinction between the former as an “Idea” and the latter as an “Event,” Barthes perceives Garbo as the divine, Platonic incarnation of all that human beauty might be; while Audrey Hepburn embodies the felicitous coming-together of charming but utterly mortal features. Yet the presence of Katharine Hepburn herself also signals an event within the context of traditional studio-era productions. For whether in response to the actress’s air of androgyny or simply the uniqueness of her striking face, the spectator encounters a female figure whose existence on the screen founds itself on an intrinsic resistance to set categorizations of beauty, conventional romantic love, and even registers of visibility (that is, the demarcation between spectator-subject and filmic object). Enabling the evasion and, in fact, dissolution of boundaries that characterizes the approach to cinema theorized by Marks and

Sobchack, Hepburn unsettles the constraints of the dominant fiction in an embodied alliance with Grant and Tracy that further elevates the dialogical rapport between audience and star.

The significance of *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year*, furthermore, lies in the fact that the narratives themselves demonstrate an overarching preoccupation with the same questions Hepburn provokes: What is the nature of feminine beauty and ideality, and how should it be defined? Can the woman-as-star “be human,” and if so, what are the stakes of her humanity? In a key example of Morin’s theory of the osmotic engagement between role and star, Tracy Lord and Tess Harding’s respective diegetic trajectories inspire the reevaluation of both the conceptions of female stardom and the dominant fiction of traditional romance that shape the spectator’s relationship to Hepburn – these being, to paraphrase a statement made by Spencer Tracy’s character in *Woman of the Year*, the story behind their stories.

II.

“This goddess must and shall remain intact!”: *The Philadelphia Story*

George: You’re like some marvelous, distant queen...so cool and fine, and always so much your own...It’s what everybody feels about you.

One of the finest romantic comedies of Hollywood’s golden era, *The Philadelphia Story* is a film characterized by its quick, witty dialogue and the precision of its performances by Hepburn, Cary Grant, James Stewart, and Ruth Hussey. Tracy Lord stands at the

center of the various romantic entanglements played out through the narrative's comedy of errors: On the eve of her wedding to George Kittredge, her pompous fiancé, Tracy learns that her first husband, C.K. Dexter Haven (Cary Grant), has returned to her estate with two magazine reporters in tow. Mike Conner and Liz Embry (Ruth Hussey) plan to cover the notoriously private heiress's wedding for *Spy* magazine, the editor of which threatens to reveal the scandal of Tracy's father's philandering if she does not comply. By the day of her wedding, after a champagne-infused evening with Mike, Tracy must choose between George, Mike, and Dexter – ultimately deciding to relinquish her role as a (nearly) unimpeachable golden-girl and give her heart and hand to her first husband.

Yet amidst the almost kinetic energy of the plots and dialogue, one of the most pivotal moments in the film takes place in stillness and without words. Holding Tracy/Hepburn in long-shot as she walks down the steps of her pool-house, the camera remains static as she approaches the pool and looks down at the water contemplatively. Tracy first appears to gaze upon a toy boat floating in the pool, a model of the *True Love*, the yacht upon which she and Dexter sailed on their honeymoon; but then her look seems to rest upon her own reflection, which mirrors her pose exactly as she stands at the edge of the pool, dressed in a white robe against the marble purity of the pool-house behind her. Indeed, the precision of pose borne by the “real” Tracy and her sedately-shimmering reflected

counterpart fill the frame to form a tableau in which Tracy looks not so much like a woman, but rather like an otherworldly goddess in her temple.²¹ Literally statue-esque in her classical elegance, Hepburn here draws the gaze of the haptic viewer into a milieu of enchanting sensorial tranquility, an almost metaphysical suspension of the boundaries between actuality and reflection, earth and water, and – in her occupation of both sections of the bisected shot – even gravity itself.

Only minutes before, Dexter had approached Tracy bearing both the model of the True Love and a desire to “have [his] say” about the nature of his first wife. Accusing her of perceiving herself as a goddess above the weak mortals surrounding her, Dexter declares,

You’ll never be a first-class human being or a first-class woman until you’ve learned to have some regard for human frailty. It’s a pity your own foot can’t slip a little sometime – but your sense of inner divinity wouldn’t allow it. ‘This goddess must and shall remain intact!’

Though Tracy denies this characterization, in her solitary moment before the pool the very “inner divinity” spoken of by Dexter seems to have translated itself into an external radiance that inspires narcissistic introspection and wonder at her own image. For in this moment, the eye of the camera leaves no doubt as to Tracy’s position

²¹ Though Stanley Cavell does not specifically refer to this image in his study of *The Philadelphia Story*, he notes that other scenes by the pool (with Tracy/Hepburn diving into the water, for example) allow the spectator to “study Katharine Hepburn’s body” (140) as the physical expression of Tracy’s diegetic identities as both goddess and flesh-and-blood woman.

as a goddess wholly “intact”; that is, a completely fulfilled subject whose reality matches the ideality of the self revealed in the mirror. Though earlier Tracy insisted that she does not “want to be worshipped...[but] loved,” in this shot the “true love” upon which Tracy gazes may, in truth, be her own reflection.

In terms of the narrative, this shot represents the apex of Tracy’s ideality, informing the spectator’s understanding of her character for the remainder of the film even as Tracy’s foot, to use Dexter’s words, slips a little. Yet in a moment of intertwining between the diegetic and extra-diegetic, the image also stands as the apex of Hepburn’s star presence in *The Philadelphia Story*. After the release of *Holiday* in 1938, Hepburn had been labeled “box-office poison” by the Hollywood establishment; and in an effort to revive her career, she returned to the New York stage in a highly successful comeback vehicle: the Phillip Barry play upon which *The Philadelphia Story* is based. After selling the screen rights of the play to MGM Studios, Hepburn returned to Hollywood to make the movie that would definitively reestablish her stardom. As Hepburn mused in an interview towards the end of her life, “I gave [Tracy Lord] life, and she gave me back my career.”²²

This shot, then, conveys a deliberate, almost self-conscious aura of sublime femininity that restores the star presence of the actress who had only several years before been deemed *persona non*

²² From the 1993 documentary *Katharine Hepburn: All About Me*.

grata. With its mythic connotations, the image also evokes a return to the stars of the early Hollywood era – thus inviting another comparison of Garbo and Hepburn. As Morin writes in *The Stars*, Garbo on-screen is “elsewhere, lost in her dream, inaccessible” (7) as she emerges, before her final retirement, from “the twilight of the gods” (9) that dimmed the careers of her contemporaries. In this moment in *The Philadelphia Story*, however, the greatness of the female star is not lost in twilight but bathed in an illuminating moonlight – the long-shot framing Hepburn as, in an homage to the Garbo-esque, she muses solitarily in a gloriously inaccessible dreamscape. In this moment, Hepburn plays the role of the star as much as that of Tracy Lord.

Again, however, Hepburn’s very presence denotes a sense of dynamism that unsettles the viewer’s traditional conceptualizations of female stardom. Just as the spectator questions the aesthetic implications of Hepburn’s persona, by the conclusion of the shot the spectator begins to consider his/her relationship to the reflecting pool of the image. For Tracy/Hepburn regards the vision of herself in the water much as the audience regards the vision of her on the screen: enrapt and fascinated, aware of her identity as an ideal double of humanity. In its diegetic context, the shot represents the moment in which Tracy expressly appears as a goddess and relates to herself as such; in extra-diegetic terms, the shot both exalts Katharine Hepburn’s star presence and enacts – through Hepburn’s gaze at her

shimmering image – the spectator’s own engagement with the star as an ego-ideal. No longer gazing upon the closed world of a Garbo, the spectator sees his/her gaze mirrored on the screen.

Though this scene represents perhaps the most lyrical instance of the spectator’s “reflection” in the film, it actually first appears in an earlier sequence when Tracy meets Mike and Liz. In a plot twist, the reporters initially believe that they are undercover and do not realize that Tracy knows their intentions – and that she herself intends to, as she scornfully declares, “give them a picture of home-life that will stand their hair on end.” Throughout the sequence, as Tracy deliberately acts the part of the high-society princess, the *mise en scène* accentuates this sense of the performative and places Tracy on a kind of stage above Mike and Liz; and as their inadvertent role as her personal audience becomes apparent, so too does their place as the spectator’s on-screen surrogate.

The design of the sequence, which takes place in a parlor filled with various portraits and *objets d’art* bespeaking class and “old-money,” founds itself on an almost self-conscious construction of the star performance: In those shots framing all three characters, Tracy sits elevated on a table to the left of the frame, while Liz and Mike are seated on a couch beneath her and to the right, with Liz in the foreground of the shot. And in contrast to the standard two-shots that frame Liz and Mike in shot/reverse-shot, Tracy herself operates from a position of power in close-ups that, with their diffused

lighting, create a halo around her hair and call attention to Tracy/Hepburn's stunning cheekbones and smile. Dressed in white and beaming upon her audience, Tracy commands their gaze and attention as she prattles on with vivacity, her (that is, Hepburn's) voice – with its distinctive enunciation and sharply resonant tones – dominating the aural space of the soundtrack. The extra-diegetic spectator, then, engages with the charismatic presence of *both* Tracy, the heroine of the narrative, and Hepburn, the leading lady of the film itself.



Tracy/Hepburn in close-up.



With her audience.

Morin remarks that the technical design of a film helps to inspire the spectator's projection-identification by using the close-up to "focus...on...the most affecting thing in the world: a beautiful human face" (*Stars* 134). Certainly here the close-up serves to signal not only the spectator's immersion in Hepburn's charisma and charm, but also Liz and Mike's nonplussed captivation; there is the sense that, like the audience, the couple sees Tracy in close-up. This is also Tracy/Hepburn's first extended shot-reverse-shot sequence in close-up, a fact that underscores the scene's depiction of a deliberate

construction of stardom. In an instance of Morin's theory of osmotic engagement between star and role ("actor and role mutually determine each other" [*Stars* 28]), the divinizing shift from real to ideal that the theorist links to the process of projection-identification takes place for both the extra-diegetic spectator and Tracy's diegetic audience.

The most striking shot of the sequence, however, occurs when the camera changes position and frames the scene from behind Liz. With only the back of Liz's head visible in the foreground, she mirrors the position of the audience itself, witnessing the encounter between Tracy (still seated above Liz and to the left) and Mike without taking direct part in it. Almost anchoring the foreground of the frame with her brunette hair, an utterly grounding chromatic texture contrasting Tracy/Hepburn's weightless ethereality, Liz occupies the frame as a presence more akin to the off-screen reality of the audience itself. In *Star Acting: Gish, Garbo, Davis*, Charles Affron writes that audience members "are active in the assimilation of gesture, tone, expression, décor, and the general structure that contains the specific performance we witness" (4); and in this shot, Liz reflects both the earthly corporeality and the processes of the spectator as she absorbs Tracy/Hepburn's highly affected, stylized presentation of radiant elegance. In a *mise en abîme* of spectatorship, the extra-diegetic spectator watches Hepburn just as Liz and Mike

watch Tracy, both audiences observing the construction of an extra- and intra-narrative star performance.



Liz/Hussey, the spectator to Tracy/Hepburn's star.

In “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality,” Iris M. Young explores the idea of “feminine spatiality,” or the particular relationship a woman has to the space around her. Young sets forth that women engage with their surrounding environment as body-objects rather than body-subjects; that is, they are things that “exist...as *looked at and acted upon*” (38), “rooted in *place*” (41) in a disharmonious relationship to their surroundings. Such a concept easily relates to feminist writings on cinema, especially within the framework that perceives the woman as an object set-apart by and for the scopophilic pleasure of the male gaze; yet in relating Young’s theory to the two scenes discussed here, the boundaries of the on-screen female figure become less irrevocably defined.

In her commentary on Young’s work, Sobchack states that space represents the intersection between the dimensions of the subject’s lived-body and the surrounding objective environment that

“provides the context and horizons for projects and action” (155).

Though the long-shot by the pool and the series of close-ups in Tracy’s encounter with Liz and Mike initially seem to offer instances of Hollywood cinema dictating and limiting the woman’s place in space, one must consider Tracy/Hepburn’s own “projects and action” within those shots. In the first, Tracy engages with her reflection as a realization of her own perfection as an ideal, while Hepburn reclaims the frame as the milieu in which she aligns herself with the pantheon of great film stars; and in the close-ups, Tracy deliberately courts the gaze of the audience, playing the role of the star even as Hepburn herself signifies stardom. In both images, the woman’s place within the space of the shots represents not the reduction of her subjecthood, but rather the physical expression of both the heroine and the actress’s project of establishing their identities as respective goddesses of the narrative and the screen.

The inclusion of the spectator’s reflection in the space of these shots extends the “context and horizons” of the frame even further, putting Sobchack’s theory of the dialogical relationship between the film and its viewer into practice. With the spectator’s active gaze mirrored either by Liz and Mike or Tracy herself, s/he “shares cinematic space with the film” (*The Address* 10) in a nexus of subjectivities linking the existential experiences of both entities. Just as Hepburn invites a consideration of the nature of female beauty, the scenes provoke an awareness of the spectator’s role in the crafting of

the phenomenological significance of the film and, more precisely, the star inhabiting it – an awareness, that is, that the identity of the star requires the desirous and validating attention of the spectator in order to remain a goddess fully intact.

Mike: Can she be human?

It would be logical to propose that Tracy's leading men further mirror the admiring gaze of the spectator, and certainly both George and Mike perceive Tracy as the ultimate incarnation of femininity in a kind of idealizing variation on the male look theorized by Mulvey. Dexter, however, refuses to suspend his disbelief in Tracy's ideality. Stanley Cavell describes Dexter as a paternal, even authorial figure in the film – "a surrogate for the film's director" (139) in his ability to control and determine the events of the narrative. As the only realist in a world dominated by the illusion of Tracy's infallibility, Dexter infuses *The Philadelphia Story* with a sense of extra-diegetic objectivity. Holding a mirror up to the nature of Tracy's "stardom," Dexter reveals it to be a deliberate construct preventing her from becoming "a first-class human being."²³ Yet where the narrative moves forward with the express intention of proving the humanity of Tracy Lord (or rather *disproving* her proclaimed perfection), the overarching project of the film concerns itself with reaffirming Katharine Hepburn's status as a goddess of the

²³ For an analysis of the humanization of Katharine Hepburn's persona in her career from 1945 – 1960, see Janet Thumim's article " 'Miss Hepburn is humanized': The Star Persona of Katharine Hepburn." In this essay, Thumim examines the publicity material that surrounded Hepburn at the middle-stage of her professional life.

screen – an endeavor fulfilled, ironically, by the very wedding scene that concludes the movie with Tracy’s submission to Dexter’s interventions. Truly, the marriage between Dexter and Tracy represents a marriage of star presences between Cary Grant and Hepburn, a union marking the “happy ending” to the latter’s comeback.

Early in the film, upon meeting Mike and Liz, Dexter describes his history with Tracy by stating, “You might say Miss Lord and I grew up together.” In narrative terms, this remark obviously alludes to the couple’s ill-fated first marriage; in relation to the extra-diegetic construct of the film, this comment references Grant’s history with Hepburn as a co-star. In their three films preceding *The Philadelphia Story* – *Sylvia Scarlett*, *Bringing Up Baby*, and *Holiday* – Hepburn and Grant radiate a charged chemistry in which the effortless charisma of the latter balances the more spirited, often off-beat charm of the former. (In his study *Cary Grant: Comedy and Male Desire*, Britton even remarks upon the shared element of bisexuality in the stars’ respective personas (11 – 12) – a nuance of their rapport not as evident in the straight-forward heterosexual romance of Cukor’s film, however.) Their final collaboration in *The Philadelphia Story* does in fact offer the ultimate rendering of this shared energy, a refined connection that further exalts Hepburn and Grant’s stardom even as Tracy herself ultimately rejects such pedestals.

In a prologue to the events of the film, the opening sequence depicts the last encounter between Tracy and Dexter as man and wife: He leaves the house carrying two suitcases, as she follows behind with golf tees and clubs. In a gesture of contemptuous defiance, Tracy drops the tees and snaps one of the clubs (in what Britton interprets as a metaphor for castration (222)) – only to have Dexter follow her to the door of the house and push her in the face, knocking her down. In the final shot of the scene, Tracy lies on the floor, looking after Dexter. Following an inter-title signaling “Two Years Later,” however, a photograph of Tracy from the society pages appears, proclaiming her upcoming marriage to George. With its varnished glamour, this shot offers proof of Tracy’s recovery from her defeat at Dexter’s hands.



From the opening scene.

Yet that wordless contest lingers as the moment defining the dynamic between the couple. As Tracy aggressively asserts the force of her will over Dexter and he subsequently pushes her off her pedestal, each has met his or her match in the other. Even more than

this, the exchange introduces the complexities of Dexter's relationship to Tracy: Not only has he been a casualty of her narcissism, but he also has the ability to conquer the goddess. He knows that she can, in fact, be human. In possessing such knowledge, Dexter represents a threat to Tracy's identity – a power made evident in their first meeting since the divorce. After she walks up to him angrily, he steps forward as if to embrace her. Warily avoiding his advances, Tracy steps backward and the two continue this choreography of reflection and deflection in medium-shot for several steps, until Dexter ceases his pursuit and each retreats to opposite sides of the frame.



Dexter and Tracy, reunited.

On the diegetic level, Tracy's blatant refusal of Dexter's proximity conveys not merely a resistance to his untimely reappearance or the possibility of physical aggression, but a fear of another revelation of weakness on her part. As Dexter later remarks to Mike, "strength is her religion"; and indeed, Dexter's presence shakes Tracy's narcissistic faith in her own perfection. Despite

Tracy's obvious resistance to Dexter, however, there nonetheless exists in the space between them an intense energy. Two lived-bodies moving in tandem with harmonized precision, Grant and Hepburn's graceful athleticism and steady eye contact bespeak an attuned physicality that counters the discord of the narrative situation. Calling upon Hepburn's corporeal expressivity, Grant's presence in the scene – and indeed the film itself – highlights the intrinsic dynamism of her on-screen impact in a way that extends to and heightens the sensory sympathy of the spectator. Though Dexter describes his role in his marriage to Tracy as “that of a kind of high priest to a virgin goddess,” the stars embodying these characters share a kindred sensuality that belies such narrative appraisals of Tracy's physicality. Relating to each other not through hierarchical binaries (priest/goddess; male/female) but in embodied mutuality, Grant and Hepburn call upon the spectator's own bodily investment – an intersection between the on- and off-screen dimensions highlighted in a brief exchange the night before Tracy's wedding.

For most of the film, Cukor employs a glowing, bright lighting that complements the energetic wit of the narrative; in a marked departure from this design, however, he places Hepburn and Grant in an intimate, shared close-up that shades the stars' faces in a chiaroscuro-effect. As Tracy sits in her car to the left of the frame, drowsy from the champagne she has just drunk at a party, Dexter enters the shot cautiously and watches her while she sleeps. In

contrast to their earlier encounters, the mood between Tracy and Dexter is subdued and tender – he tells her that she looks beautiful and invites her in for a drink; she demurs quietly. With the merging of the lush shadows concealing the lower part of their faces and a bright light creating a kind of aureole around their heads, the image evokes an oneiric mood of suspended reality as the two erstwhile lovers find each other again, for a moment. What the spectator finds in the scene, moreover, is the romance of the Marksian “loss of self in the presence in the other” (*Touch* 20) – a rapport founded not in the demarcation of subject and object, but in the interweaving of two respective subjectivities. Illustrating Tracy and Dexter’s “giving-over to the other” (*ibid*), to adopt Marks’s phrase, the image seduces the audience itself in its material expression of diegetic sensuality.

Just as Hepburn and Grant engaged in a wary choreography in their first meeting after the divorce, each mirroring the other’s motions, here another process of reflection takes place as the two stars sit side-by-side in profile. Reminiscent of the impact of the shot in which Tracy gazed at her image in the pool, this close-up presents an exchange of idealities in the figures of Hepburn and Grant – a realization of that aspect of Morin’s “myth of love” in which “the great lovers rule the screen...investing their interpreters with divinizing virtues” (*Stars* 30). In this way, the shot dissolves the tensions surrounding Tracy’s narcissism and Dexter’s insistence on her reformation in order for the audience to recall its own role in the

extra-diegetic love story of star and spectator. Tracy and Dexter may, to use Morin's words, "focus love's magic" (30) on each other, but the spectator focuses the magic of his/her love on Hepburn and Grant as complementary presences in the visual impact of the film.

The final sequence of *The Philadelphia Story*, with its "double marriage" between Tracy and Dexter, Hepburn and Grant, seeks to resolve both romances. Tracy – dressed in white once again, though this time as a bride and not a goddess – tells her father that she has "never...been so full of love before," and that she finally feels "like a human being." Yet as Tracy and Dexter (with Mike and Liz in attendance) meet at the altar, the editor of *Spy* magazine appears suddenly and takes a picture of the stunned wedding party. While the film's theme plays merrily in the background, the last two images are of photographs in the tabloid itself – the first of Mike, Dexter, and Tracy's shocked faces, followed by the turning of a page to a photo of Dexter and Tracy kissing as man and wife. Now that Tracy has forsaken her love for herself in order to love another, the narrative may end happily with an image of marital bliss – in this way replacing the myth of Narcissus with the myth of completion between man and woman. In delayed response to the demand "can she be human?," the narrative resolution of the film replies that Tracy's humanity can only truly be achieved through ceding her *hubris* to Dexter's superiority.

This ending also represents the conclusion of the extra-diegetic “story behind the story” in terms of the spectator’s love affair with Hepburn – though in a way that troubles Cavell. He notes that this shift from motion picture to still photography bears unsettling implications for the spectator, who now feels compelled to question “the mode of [his/her] perception” (160) in relation to the film. For Cavell, the placement of the diegetic figures on the pages of a magazine indicates that rather than accept Tracy’s humanization, the audience must contend with the notion that “[it has]...traded the goddess for a movie star” (160). What Cavell interprets as a disruption, however, functions instead as the last word in *The Philadelphia Story*’s running dialogue with the spectator. Just as the design of the film alternately calls upon and acknowledges the role of the audience in the construction of Hepburn’s ideality, the presentation of this final shot directly recognizes Hepburn’s place in the fan magazines that, as Morin states, “pour out on the faithful all the vivifying elements of their faith” (*Stars* 57). Pictured in her last embrace with Grant,²⁴ her star presence matched by that of her co-star, Hepburn has stepped off of Tracy’s pedestal onto the pages of a fan magazine – moving closer to the spectator whose devotion, to phrase the issue in Morin’s terms, ensures her divinity.

²⁴ Quite literally their last embrace – *The Philadelphia Story* was the stars’ final collaboration.



Surprised by the tabloid reporter.

Cavell's commentary on the stylistic contrast between moving and still image does, however, reveal much about the disjuncture between a classic happy ending and what he calls the more "ambiguous status" (160) of the actual finale. With the closing kiss contained within the frame of a picture instead of the moving film, the spectator becomes aware of "something at a remove from what has gone before...betokening uncertainty" (ibid) in the ostensibly definitive love match. Even as the kinship between *Spy* magazine and fan publications brings to mind Hepburn's extra-diegetic role as a star, it also presents an abrupt end to the audience's collective suspension of disbelief. As Cavell notes, "we find ourselves awakened from the position of illusory participant to that of observer" (160). To take this reading further still, one could argue that just as Hepburn's embodiment of Tracy's narrative identity inspires a recognition of the star as a construction, the closing photograph guides the spectator's emergence from an unquestioning immersion in the dominant fiction depicted in *The Philadelphia Story*

to an awareness of that fiction as such. Certainly, as the following section will address, what Britton has called the narrative “strategy of recuperating Hepburn for the patriarchal couple” (184) continues in *Woman of the Year*, ultimately placing her character in thrall to Spencer Tracy’s. Yet as with Cukor’s film, Hepburn’s union with her male co-star as a complementary force in the sensuality of haptic visuality manages to release the film from the constraints of classical Hollywood’s dominant fiction, revealing the alternative possibilities that underlie conventions of the woman-as-star and as romantic partner.

III.

“Believe in the ideal – you saw it once, it still exists”:
Woman of the Year

Tess: I like knowing more about what goes on than most people.

With its celebration of the triumph of the couple, *The Philadelphia Story* sets the foundation for the Spencer Tracy-Katharine Hepburn cycle that begins with Hepburn’s subsequent film, *Woman of the Year*. Indeed, Britton describes *The Philadelphia Story* as “the first Hepburn/Tracy film” (183), noting that in both works the respective male leads assume the responsibility of humanizing or (as in *Woman of the Year*) domesticating the headstrong Hepburn heroines. Yet where *The Philadelphia Story* offers a more whimsical account of this project, *Woman of the Year* presents a case of extremes: Tess Harding is an adamantly independent, essentially arrogant international celebrity, and Sam

Craig (Spencer Tracy) is the grounded Everyman who falls in love with her – only to find that Tess’s narcissistic involvement with her public image makes any chance of personal happiness through marriage impossible. By the end of the movie, however, the couple agrees to seek a balanced union in which Tess Harding adopts the identity of “Tess Harding-Craig”; just as Hepburn herself, in fact, takes on the mantle of the “Tracy-Hepburn” pairing.

Co-starring in nine films together, including *Adam’s Rib* (Cukor, 1949) and *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?* (Stanley Kramer, 1967), and maintaining a personal relationship that lasted until Tracy’s death in 1967, Tracy and Hepburn belong among the most famous of classic Hollywood couples. Yet beyond the fascination of extra-diegetic lore, the pairing of Hepburn and Tracy brings to the screen a merging of complementary embodied forces, the creation of a unique body-landscape: the lean and sometimes brittle physicality of Hepburn finding its counterpart in the gravitas of Tracy, a figure stoically grounding the frame with the relative bulk of his body. Diverging from the graceful precision of Grant, Tracy’s languid, almost ponderous, occupation of space provides an anchoring counterpart to Hepburn’s kinetic energy. As the diegesis goes on to explore the trials and consequences of a woman’s preoccupation with her own stardom, placing Tess on a pedestal eventually toppled by her husband, Hepburn and Tracy’s continuum

of corporeality renders the screen itself a more level field of interplay between the on-screen figures and the off-screen haptic viewer.



Tess/Hepburn and Sam/Tracy, *Woman of the Year*.

From the beginning of *Woman of the Year*, Tess's own persona appears perhaps even more challenging than Hepburn's. In an opening montage of headlines, the spectator learns of Tess's international importance as she advises heads of state on the verge of American involvement in World War II; and in a radio interview, Tess demonstrates an impressive knowledge of history but alienates listeners with her contempt for baseball ("a frightful waste of energy"). In a later, telling exchange with Sam, Tess reveals her *modus operandi*:

Sam: I'd like to know what you like, and what you don't like. How you feel about being you.

Tess: I feel very good about it. Always have. I like knowing more about what goes on than most people...and telling them.

Maintaining a distance from the less-refined elements of society, Tess is as aloof from the masses of humanity as the portrait of herself that

hangs in her home – an association that recalls *The Philadelphia Story*'s own engagement with questions of feminine spatiality as, like Tracy, Tess deliberately positions herself in space as an object of admiration.

A love scene between Tess and Sam taking place early in their romance makes clear the former's agenda in negotiating space. As the couple walks into Tess's apartment, the larger-than-life portrait hangs on the wall, brightly illuminated while Sam and Tess remain in the shadows. After a cut from a close-up of the lovers kissing in dusky silhouette, there follows a long-shot that frames Sam as he gazes up at the portrait looming above him. Tess disappears around a corner, only to return immediately in a medium-shot – one that captures her knowing smile as she looks at Sam, up at the portrait, and then at Sam again. Once back to the long-shot, Tess asks Sam if he likes the painting; to which he replies, "Beautiful...A little too high to reach."²⁵ Following a cut to a medium-shot in silhouette a final time, Tess remarks, "I'm not," and embraces Sam.

²⁵ Indeed, the question of class underlies the dynamic of the Tracy-Hepburn pairing in this film. As Britton has noted in his study of Hepburn, she "embod[ies] at once 'aristocracy' and a vivid...female assertiveness and intransigence" (70) – with the diegesis of *Woman of the Year* seeking to resolve *both* of these issues through what the critic calls a "system of checks and balances" between Tess and Sam at the conclusion of the film (201). Dismantling the societal hierarchy that divides the couple, the narrative ends with the promise of a relationship as equals – though, as this chapter will go on to explore, that very promise bears unsettling implications in itself.

Furthermore, with the privileged Tess/Hepburn eventually "put in her place" by the everyman of Sam/Tracy, the film concludes with a sense of duality that invites further analysis in terms of understanding the spectator's identification with and pleasure in the film: the narrative resolution calling for Tess to cede her rarefied, intellectually-aristocratic existence to the grounded Sam, with the extra-diegetic construct of the star system seeking to heighten Hepburn's very ideality as

Even as Tess declares her approachability, the design of the sequence itself illustrates her insistence on presenting herself as an otherworldly ideal. Pacing itself in a kind of embrace-and-release pattern in the “elastic, dynamic” rhythm described by Marks, the scene creates a dream-like scenario of romance: Like Sam, the spectator finds him/herself alternately seduced by the intimacy of close shots in silhouette and impressed by the expanse of the long-shots that highlight the magnificence of Tess’s painted reflection. Reminiscent of the car scene between Tracy/Hepburn and Dexter/Grant, this scene inspires a closeness between on-screen couple and off-screen spectator, crafting a milieu of lush shadows interspersed with a subdued, almost pearly illumination. Holding each other in silhouette, Tess/Hepburn and Sam/Tracy – with fragments of light fleetingly caressing their faces – appear not in opposition (male or female, ideal or real) but intertwined, dissolving the distinction between self and other in a union thereof. The shot of Tess watching Sam gaze at her portrait, however, abruptly intrudes upon this mood and reveals to the spectator that Tess not only revels in herself as a construction (“Like it?”), but seeks to control that deliberately produced image. In a manner even more obvious than Tracy’s, Tess positions herself as the object of the gaze, maneuvering between the space of Sam’s arms and the portrait on the wall with the

an on-screen figure. Though not to be discussed extensively in this project, the notion of the viewer’s vexed desires – placated by both the character’s societal “downfall” and the exaltation of the star herself – does invite a study of the intersection between class-consciousness, spectatorship, and the star system.

intention of wooing her lover into perceiving her as the model of femininity that she believes herself to be.

In this way, the scene also introduces Sam's role as one that parallels that of the extra-diegetic spectator. Gazing at Tess's portrait, Sam resembles an enraptured fan; holding her in his arms, he lives the fantasy of a fan who has dreamt of capturing his/her ideal. Whereas *The Philadelphia Story* presents Dexter/Cary Grant as a partner utterly equal to Tracy/Hepburn's off-beat magnetism, *Woman of the Year*'s male protagonist bears a more earthy presence – rendering him less a traditional leading man than a glorified Everyman. In this account of the myth of love, Sam/Tracy portrays an altogether different kind of hero than Dexter/Grant's debonair romantic; for though his status as a star implicitly purifies him “of the dross of daily life” (Morin, *Stars* 30) of an off-screen reality, Sam/Tracy nonetheless stands as representative of that daily life lived and recognized by the spectator. Dexter may have stood as a surrogate for the film's director, but Sam stands in for the unassuming spectator.²⁶

²⁶ Though the thesis will not explore questions of the male psyche in-depth, focusing instead on the female subjectivity, it is nonetheless worthwhile to briefly examine the implications of Sam's characterization in this film. A sequence early in the film explores Sam's alignment with the off-screen spectator, as he meets Tess in a theatre where she is giving a speech. Accidentally finding himself on the stage with Tess instead of in the audience, Sam awkwardly sits behind her and proceeds to set in motion a series of minor mishaps while she speaks eloquently about women's rights. While Tess thrives as the center of attention, Sam's discomfort is that of a man wary of the spotlight, or what Tess's aunt later describes as “a normal human being” with simply “a heart, a job [he] like[s] to do, and a future.” As such, Tracy's performance as Sam exemplifies Cavell's notion in *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* of “individualities” in cinema, or those particular identities embodied by various stars. Writing that individualities

The retiring nature of his narrative counterpart notwithstanding, Tracy himself asserts a solidity of presence that – while not overpowering Hepburn – balances the comparative buoyancy of her physicality. Filmed together, regardless of narrative situation, each actor appears in the frame as the other’s corresponding figure – a united force of corporeal subjectivities within the flesh of the film itself. This simpatico exchange finds expression in a brief scene towards the middle of *Woman of the Year*, in which Tess and Sam bicker over the lack of time they have together. Within the space of a medium long-shot, Sam lies on the couch with Tess draped over him in a pose of flirtatious seduction undermined by the tension between husband and wife. But even as the characters exchange harsh words, the visual rapport between Hepburn and Tracy imbues the shot with a sense of identities attuned rather in opposition to each other. With only three-quarters of Hepburn’s visage and Tracy’s profile captured, the spectator perceives the intrinsic interplay

“project...particular ways of inhabiting a social role” (33), Cavell addresses the fact that “types” of characters exist on-screen as a means of depicting the “human subject” in all its roles and guises (35). In this way, then, Sam/Tracy inhabits the immediately recognizable social role of the “regular guy,” the light-comedy foil to Tess/Hepburn’s “classy lady.”

Yet even in viewing the scene in the theatre as emblematic of Sam’s clumsy charm, one must nonetheless consider the tensions he introduces. As those mishaps he instigates disrupt Tess’s speech, he makes ridiculous not only himself but also her idealistic words of feminine equality – thus subtly disclosing the patriarchal bias that underlies the individuality of Hollywood’s Everyman. This moment also typifies one of the fundamental dynamics in play within Hepburn and Spencer Tracy’s chemistry: While Hepburn seeks to command the stage, Tracy presents the counterpart that anchors her lofty ambitions. Such a juxtaposition presents a variation on what Morin describes as the star’s negotiation between “screen-heaven and earth” (*Stars* 23) – with Hepburn’s elegant energy placing her in the former, and Tracy’s stoic grounded-ness marking him as belonging to the latter.

between the planes of the stars' faces; Tracy's gently curving forehead and nose and Hepburn's sharply defined nose and mouth meeting in an evocation of Beugnet's body-landscape, a continuum of facial features cohering their respective extremes. Projected in this way upon the screen, the organic affinity between Hepburn and Tracy affirms this relationship of lived-bodies as the prevailing one of the film.



The continuum of Tess/Hepburn and Sam/Tracy.

In the diegesis itself, of course, Tess's insistence on her own supremacy relegates Sam all the more firmly to the quotidian plane, a division made explicit on the evening of her acceptance of the "Woman of the Year" award. Seated before her dressing-table mirror to the left of the frame in a medium long-shot, Tess prepares herself for her triumphant public appearance as Sam walks up behind her and smells her hair. Tess ducks away and, with an accusing "Darling!," grabs a hand mirror to inspect the damage to her coiffure. Standing awkwardly by his wife's side, Sam appears utterly out of place and

disruptive to the harmony of Tess's narcissistic contemplation. He finally walks away, asking as he leaves the room if he will have to make a speech at the ceremony; to which Tess replies, following a cut to her seated alone in front of the mirror, "I don't see why."

What Tess does see, however, is herself as an object worthy of admiration and reverence. At the moment of her greatest career triumph, Tess literally rejects Sam – and, minutes later, the refugee child she has impulsively adopted to show her commitment to the war effort – as part of the "dross of daily life" whose proximity may tarnish her public identity of ideality. Indeed, Tess's retreat into and preservation of the sanctity of her own image in this scene present a variation on Christian Metz's discussion of scopophilia in *The Imaginary Signifier*. He writes that the voyeur deliberately maintains "a gulf, an empty space, between the object and the eye, the object and his own body"; and in so guarding against the consumption of the object, the scopophilic subject protects the very desire that drives him/her to pursue that object (60). Though clearly the clandestine nature of voyeurism does not apply in considering this concept in terms of narcissism, there nonetheless remains a fundamental parallel between the two modes of desire: for the life of narcissistic desire can only be preserved as long as the subject preserves his/her identity as an object.

In Tess's view, then, Sam's proprietary gestures represent a kind of trespassing upon the gulf, the empty space that she has so

carefully constructed between her real self-as-subject and her ideal self-as-object. If Tess is no longer “too high” for Sam to reach, how can she continue to perceive herself as a gloriously unattainable figure of womanhood – that is, a star? In extra-diegetic terms, this sequence suggests that like the Metzian spectator him/herself, the star must negotiate a balance between distance and proximity to her own image, always with the express intention of distinguishing her place in Morin’s screen-heaven from her fan’s earthly milieu. As Morin succinctly explains, “The star must nourish her own myth” (*Stars* 55). Where *The Philadelphia Story* explores the star as a construct, *Woman of the Year* reveals her means of self-preservation.

In considering the dialogic interplay between film and viewer taking place in *Woman of the Year*, however, Tess’s monologic self-absorption seems almost ironic. Further discussing the voyeur, Metz goes on to relate him/her to “those cinema spectators who take care to avoid being too close to or too far from the screen” (60). Perceiving the movie as an object of pleasure fragile in its fulfilling affect, the voyeuristic spectator shifts between what Marks calls “an illusion of self-sufficiency and a realization of absolute lack” (*Touch* 20) in his/her relationship to the film. Yet in this work, the proximity – and fluidity – between on- and off-screen subjectivities reject such games of distance and dominance. To recall Sobchack’s phrasing, the audience shares the space of the film, symbiotically negotiating the existential experience of the cinematic world rather than seeking to

master it through the gaze. In contrast to the vacuum of myopia that characterizes Tess's perspective, the viewer engages in an expansion of visual understanding and identification.

Sam: The "outstanding woman of the year" isn't a woman at all.

Immediately before Tess leaves for the awards ceremony, blithely disregarding the needs of her adopted child, Sam makes the above declaration. He refuses to attend the event and tells Tess to make his excuses, a request that infuriates her ("Who would believe that you had anything important enough to do [to miss the ceremony]?"). This bitter quarrel presents a turning point not only in the narrative's sequence-of-events (Sam moves out of their home after returning the child to the orphanage) but also in its definitive disclosure of the ideal of femininity presented in the film: Sam does not want a star, but a wife; that is, a woman who accepts her place by his side and in the home. In labeling Tess as "not a woman at all," Sam marks her as an Other rebelling against the norms of femininity set forth by the dominant fiction. If, as Silverman suggests, ideology allows "members of a collectivity [to] see themselves within the same reflecting surface" (*Male Subjectivity* 24), then here Sam condemns Tess for the rebellious act of asserting the autonomy of her own reflection. At this moment, the audience learns that the concern of the marriage is, to reference Mike's comment in *The Philadelphia Story*, whether or not Tess can be human – with her humanity defined by the terms of a patriarchal society.

Once Sam leaves her alone to carry on her narcissistic love affair, however, Tess realizes its underlying solitude. While on the stage to receive her award, Tess stands alone and isolated in a medium close-up, turning to see her widower father and aunt's burgeoning romantic happiness as they take hands. As with Tracy in her first encounter with Dexter following their divorce, the close-up stylistically undercuts Tracy's magnificence – though this time not because of her leading man's knowing presence, but as a result of his absence. Having rejected the man who loves her, Tess now finds herself stranded in that dividing gulf upon which she insisted. Moments later, the press visit her apartment to profile her happy home and marriage; yet when it becomes clear that Sam will not make an appearance, the photographers settle for taking pictures of Tess's portrait.

This gesture of hollow admiration strikingly contrasts the reverence with which Sam had gazed at the painting. Furthermore, as Tess comes upon the photographers taking the pictures, there appears a disjuncture between the portrait and the woman herself. The shot sequence begins with a low-angle shot that both matches the perspective of the kneeling photographers and further enhances the majesty of the painting; yet when Tess herself enters the room, there is a cut to a standard medium long-shot. Lacking her former complicity with her painted self in creating an image of ideality, Tess now experiences what Sobchack refers to as a “separated...lived

experience of space” (156). Sobchack states that a woman’s lived-body often functions within a “constricted ‘here’ ” whilst looking towards “an other ‘yonder’ space which [she] can intend but cannot inhabit” (156) – and whereas Tess had constructed a fluid self moving between her painted and flesh-and-blood figure, here she must accept the division between a “yonder” illusion of ideality and the loneliness of an immediate reality “here.” “Not a woman at all” and yet no longer the untouchable goddess, Tess now belongs to a limbo of identities. Without Sam, Tess is a star without an audience – and, as he remarked, not a woman at all.

At this point in the film, Katharine Hepburn herself must negotiate her relationship to her own audience. In *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, Molly Haskell describes the ways in which Hepburn “transcend[s]” Tess’s unsympathetic nature, citing the former’s “strength of character and integrity” as well as “the soft and sensual radiance with which...George Stevens illuminated her” (6). Certainly Stevens, like Cukor before him, brings out Hepburn’s prettiness with diffused lighting that softens her angular features and feminizes the relatively strident androgyny seen in her early films; but this depiction serves more to enhance the romance of Hepburn’s relationship to the body of the film itself rather than reveal her moral core. Attributing to Hepburn such virtues as “character and integrity” and reading them as inherent within her present a flattering but vague interpretation of

the star's persona. Truly, the character of Tess succeeds at all because it builds upon the audience's awareness of Hepburn's difficult extra-diegetic persona, the greater context of Hepburn's own perceived willfulness and headstrong independence.

To rehabilitate Tess from her nearly complete immersion in the role of an anti-heroine, then, the diegesis turns to a reconciliation between her and Sam. In the last third of the film, Tess attends her father's wedding to her aunt, his former sister-in-law. Captured in an extended close-up, she listens to the wedding vows that she herself once took as tears roll down her face:

Minister: Cherish those gracious visions of your first love. Let them not be blurred by the common events of life; be not moved in your devotion. Believe in the ideal – you saw it once, it still exists. It is the final truth.

With the radiant lighting of the shot diffusing the darkness of Tess's actions and highlighting her redemptive tears, the *mise en scène* creates a *living* portrait of Tess/Hepburn – the placement of the flesh-and-blood lived-body within the framework of a classic Hollywood *tableau* of stardom. No longer seductive with her image occupying grand oil paintings or dusky silhouettes, Tess/Hepburn faces the camera with a suffusion of beatific luminescence, a woman “reborn.” If narcissism entails, as LaPlanche and Pontalis describe it, a “damming up of the libido” (255) on the part of the subject, then this close-up of Tess's tears signals the release of that troubling energy and its imminent transference to the ideal spoken of by the minister: a

marriage to Sam, complete with the “common events of life” (or the Morinian “dross of daily life”) that Tess once resisted so vehemently.²⁷ Now longing for the “yonder space” of marriage rather than the sanctity of her own objectification, Tess finally abandons the glorious solitude of her perfection with the hope of, like Tracy Lord before her, “feel[ing] like a human being” in her deference to her husband.

At the conclusion of the film, Sam and Tess reunite after she has made a disastrous attempt to prove her newfound desire for domesticity. Sam insists that he does not desire the extremes of her either hiding in his shadow or claiming the spotlight; he only wants her to be “Tess Harding-Craig,” the wife at his side. Such a compromise exemplifies the “marriage of true minds” concept that Haskell uses to describe Hepburn and Tracy’s rapport throughout their shared *oeuvre*: “Two partners instruct, inform, educate, and influence each other in the continuous college of love” (26). Yet beyond this vision of love (which operates as a kind of fairy tale in and of itself), one must consider the extreme commentary on the nature of conjugal bliss presented in the sequence that precedes Sam and Tess’s final reconciliation. For though the closing moment between the pair in *Woman of the Year* does not offer as provocative or immediate a transition for the audience as the wedding imagery in

²⁷ Andrew Britton concludes his study of Hepburn with a discussion of her on-screen tears – an expression of “vulnerability and strength” (229) – in so many of her films throughout her career.

The Philadelphia Story, the scene that segues into their embrace nonetheless reveals the ambiguities underlying this triumph of matrimony.

In a sequence lasting over 10 minutes, Tess attempts to make breakfast for Sam, following his favorite recipes. While her unsuspecting husband sleeps in the bedroom of his new bachelor pad, Tess wreaks havoc in a domestic comedy of errors: egg yolks drip on her shoe, coffee boils over, and waffles seep out of the iron. As Tess, with tears of frustration in her eyes, desperately tries to be as successful in the home as she is in the professional world, Sam silently witnesses the last few minutes of these mishaps; and though skeptical of her sincerity at first, Sam finally forgives Tess and enfolds her in his arms. Underlying the ostensible whimsy of Tess's foray into the kitchen, however, is a distinctly uncanny quality that renders the scene an uncomfortable vision of the woman's place in the space of the home – the most intimate of spheres in which the principles of the dominant fiction play out.



Cooking breakfast for Sam.

The audience watches as Tess, frantically making her way around the kitchen, devolves from a supremely confident woman of the world into a figure as addled and malfunctioning as the culinary machinery that foils her. Though clearly intended to amuse the audience both with Tess's newfound weakness and Hepburn's physical comedy, the long duration of the sequence exhausts the spectator so that the final embrace seems a mere conciliatory afterthought. Certainly Sam does declare that he does not expect Tess to go from the spotlight to complete obscurity in a domestic dungeon – but only after she has been effectively subjugated through Hepburn's *tour de force* performance of female failure. To recall Cavell's reading of the significance of the photograph *The Philadelphia Story*, then, *Woman of the Year* ends with happiness “at a remove”: more precisely, with Sam's *promise* of an equal partnership rather than the fact of it. After enduring Tess's trauma in a home-space turned uncanny, the audience cannot help but question the notion of the “ideal, final truth” of the perfect marriage upon which the film predicates itself.

But even in the midst of such dubious resolutions, what remains equally affecting is the radiance of Hepburn and Tracy's partnership as it unfolds on the flesh of the screen. Indeed, the significance of Tracy and Dexter, Tess and Sam's respective marriages shifts between the realms of the diegetic and the extra-diegetic. In the context of the films' narratives, the unions function

as a means of putting Tracy and Tess “in their places” beside their husbands, “recuperating” (to borrow Britton’s term) the women’s rebellious natures so that they may exist within the framework of the dominant fiction. Yet as the films themselves unreel in the shifting body-landscapes of Hepburn and her male co-stars, the vexed questions of female ideality and humanity cede to the embodied affect of lived beings married by a cinematic symbiosis rather than societal constraints. Not only evoking the spectator’s reconsideration of the conventions of the female star, Hepburn engages his/her sensorial investment in a romance of visual pleasure.

IV.

Conclusion: The myth unsettled

In *The Stars*, Morin relates the “double nature” of the star to that of the heroes/heroines of legend, both representing “*mortals aspiring to immortality, candidates for divinity...half-men, half-gods*” (87). Through the love of the spectator, the star achieves that divinity spoken of by Morin, thus becoming a symbol of perfection for an audience seeking an escape from the exigencies of reality. In both *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year*, Katharine Hepburn embodies the identities of two heroines who, like Morin’s star, perceive themselves as half-(wo)men, half-gods in their magnificence. Brilliant, acclaimed, and admired, both Tracy and Tess worship at the altar of their ideal selves. In the end, however, the narratives insist that Tracy and Tess remain only shadows of

demi-gods – still loved by their leading men, but definitively brought down to earth from their narcissistic aspirations through a transfer to an ostensibly more balanced, anacletic devotion.

Both films, then, offer that “marriage of true minds” heralded by Haskell. Yet in patently accepting such a dream of love as simply one of classic Hollywood’s tropes, Haskell neglects to consider its implications. As Richard Dyer points out, Haskell “treats the problem simply as people deciding to relate better to each other rather than analysing what prevents this and where the roles [played by the man and woman] come from” (*Stars* 55).²⁸ Indeed, the notion of the perfectly traditional union between man and woman stands as a greater illusion whose projection extends from the narrative on-screen to the reality of the spectator. It is a vision of completion far less fulfilling, in truth, than that one represented by the alliance of star-powers between male and female co-stars and the accompanying sensory investment of the audience itself.

For, to utilize Lacanian vocabulary, Tracy and Tess’s diegetic salvation lies in their transition from subjects satisfied by their narcissistic libido to women who accept their lovers as fulfilling *objets a* – put more plainly, the heroines must accept their own castrated state in relation to the male subject’s phallic superiority. Immediately before her remarriage to Dexter, Tracy earnestly

²⁸ Dyer goes further to remark upon “a strain of anti-gayness in [Haskell’s] writing, which suggests that the ideal relationship between women and men is also the ideal human relationship” (55).

promises to be as yar, or “easy to handle, quick to the helm, fast, bright” as the True Love; while Tess proves her newfound loyalty to Sam by cloistering herself in the kitchen and attempting to cook a lavish breakfast. Penitent, both Tracy and Tess surrender their *hubris* to benevolent but still authoritarian figures: Dexter replies, “Be whatever you like – you’re my red-head,” and Sam insists upon the hyphenated identity of “Tess Harding-Craig.” Once psychically completed by their access to the *moi* state of ideality, Tracy and Tess now move beyond the mirror and divert that cathexis of desire towards Dexter and Sam.

In understanding films like *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year* as literal projections of the theoretical gaze and screen, their niche in the abiding dominant fiction of Western society becomes apparent. When Tracy and Tess cede the self-sufficiency of their narcissistic psyches to the male subjects of the film, they enact for the spectator the project of the framing gaze; that is, they assume their roles in a diegetic destiny influenced not by Haskell’s “college of love” but rather by the standards set forth within the dominant fiction of the audience’s culture. To recall the words of the minister, that faceless voice of the patriarchy in *Woman of the Year* whose speech inspires the exorcism of Tess’s narcissistic energy, the “ideal” in which one must believe is the fulfilling union between man and woman. It is, as he intones, “the final truth.” In this way, these narratives contribute to the upholding of an extra-diegetic myth of

completion through the perfectly complementary marriage of male and female. As Morin reminds his reader, “[A]ll love is a mythic fermentation” (emphasis mine; 30), and the conventional romances to which Tracy and Tess submit are no exception.

With the embraces that signify the ostensibly satisfactory conclusions of the two films comes a more subdued visual articulation of Metz’s determination that “orgasm is the object rediscovered in a state of momentary illusion,” an event he plainly describes as an “amorous myth of fusion” (60). The interplay between the on- and off-screen dimensions enabled by a phenomenological approach to visuality, however, offers not a myth but a realization of the possibilities of *cinematic* fusion. In a poetic interpretation of the screen kiss that offers an alternative to Metz’s analysis of the fleeting (re)union with *objet a*, Morin examines a moment of nearly Marksian sensuality. Referencing traditional beliefs that associated the breath with the spirit, Morin describes the kiss as “a communication or symbiosis of souls” (145). He continues, interpreting the embrace as a moment of alignment between the “eroticism” of corporeality and the “mysticism” of ethereality; a transcendent, almost animistic exchange of “tactile voluptuousness” between the flesh of the stars in their supernatural ideality (ibid).

Equally symbiotic in its sensorial impact is the rapport between the film and the viewer – the flesh of the screen and the

corporeal awareness of the spectator uniting in a rapport of intimate immediacy surpassing the division between self and other. As Sobchack writes in her theorization of the “address of the eye” belonging to both the cinematic entity and its spectator, this interchange allows the two forms “to imaginatively reside in each other – even as they both are discretely embodied and uniquely situated” (261). She goes on to remark upon the myriad possibilities inherent within the existential experiences taking place as a result of this relationship, calling attention to “moments of divergence and rupture and moments of convergence and rapture” (286). In the alternative romance of a phenomenological/haptic visuality, the constraints of the dominant fiction collapse to reveal subjectivities attuned rather than isolated.

As a figure whose very image alternately defies and complicates conventional standards of female beauty and ideality, Katharine Hepburn gives embodied expression to those moments described by Sobchack. She is a screen presence of impressive dimensionality: Refusing to conform to the norms of traditional aesthetic appeal, yet drawing the spectator closer to the world of the film; unsettling the dominant fiction of male-female relationships while engaging in balanced cinematic love affairs of striking sensuality. In her reevaluation of the ideal woman and star, a Barthesian “event” wrought by and within the impact of her bodily form, Hepburn refuses a static iconicity and pursues instead a

dynamic identity – one that heightens the audience's own subjective understanding of the cinematic experience.

Chapter III

“What are you running away from? Is it me?”: Vanishing Differences in *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945)

I.

In the opening sequence of *Mildred Pierce* (directed by Michael Curtiz), an unknown figure – later identified as Mildred (Joan Crawford) herself, but finally revealed to be her daughter, Veda (Ann Blyth) – shoots and kills Monte Beragon (Zachary Scott). At the conclusion of the scene, the camera focuses on a mirror hanging on the wall of the room where the murder took place, its surface marred by two bullet holes. Presaging the issues of skewed identities and fragile visions of ideality that will come to define the film, the image works as a thematic establishing shot; and viewed in this way, the fact of the *two* bullet holes becomes all the more ominous. The fracturing of the reflection is caused not by a singular damaging entity, but by two such forces working in tandem. It is destruction wrought by doubles.

Filled with domestic drama and thwarted romance, murder and betrayal, *Mildred Pierce* itself bears a similarly fragmented, dual identity with its conflicted position between the genres of maternal melodrama and *film noir* – as well as as that overarching category of “women’s pictures.”²⁹ Based on the 1941 novel by James M. Cain, the film tells the story of Mildred Pierce, a divorced mother who, in

²⁹ In *The Desire to Desire*, Mary Ann Doane succinctly defines the woman’s film as one that “attempts to engage female subjectivity” (34).

order to give Veda and Kay, her two daughters, the best in life, becomes a successful businesswoman owning a chain of restaurants. After Kay's death, Mildred, driven by a consuming desire to win the love of her selfish elder daughter, marries the wealthy Monte Beragon – only to have the marriage end in tragic betrayal, when Mildred discovers that Veda and Monte have been having an affair. Finally rejected by Monte, Veda kills him in a moment of jealous rage. The film opens with Monte's murder, and the pieces of the past that led to this end are reconstructed through Mildred's flashbacks in her statement to the police detective. When her attempts to protect Veda fail, Mildred ultimately returns to her role as wife as she walks off into the sunrise with her first husband.

For all the originality of its fluctuation between the worlds of melodrama and *noir*, *Mildred Pierce* does not stand alone in this generic limbo. Released in the same year, John M. Stahl's *Leave Her to Heaven* (based on Ben Ames Williams' 1944 novel) also negotiates a place for itself in the space between domestic melodrama and the more sinister *noir* milieu. Ellen Berent Harland (Gene Tierney) devastates the lives of those around her with a jealous love that devolves into madness: She kills her brother-in-law in order to “protect” her marriage and later deliberately induces a miscarriage so that she may not have to share the devotion of her husband, Richard (Cornel Wilde); and at the end of the film, believing her husband to be in love with her cousin, Ruth (Jeanne Crain), Ellen kills herself

and frames Ruth so that she will be blamed for the death. In the last scene, however, Ellen's worst fears are realized as Ruth and Richard embrace in the hopes of reclaiming their lives from the spectre of her destruction.

Leave Her to Heaven is, admittedly, an unlikely double for *Mildred Pierce*: the former a Technicolor rendering of one woman's obsession with her husband with more obscure actress Gene Tierney in the lead; the latter a chiaroscuro-laden depiction of a mother's all-consuming love for her daughter starring the iconic Joan Crawford. Transcending such variances, however, is the essential narcissism driving the (anti)heroines to impose their respective conceptions of the ideal onto the real – Ellen seeks to fulfill her pathological need to receive all of her husband's love, and Mildred blindly determines to give her ruthless daughter the life that she herself never had – and, moreover, their shared relationships with doubles in an interplay as fatal as the two bullet holes in the shattered mirror.³⁰ Indeed, both films link the downfall of the lead characters to their engagement with a counterpart who – whether as an amoral daughter, as Veda is in *Mildred Pierce*, or a winningly wholesome young woman like Ruth in *Leave Her to Heaven* – inspires the mimetic rivalry theorized by René Girard. In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the*

³⁰ In her article "Two-Faced Women: The 'Double' in Women's Melodramas of the 1940s," Lucy Fischer examines three films – *Cobra Woman* (Robert Siodmak, 1945), *Dark Mirror* (Siodmak, 1946), and *A Stolen Life* (Curtis Bernhardt, 1946) – and their treatment of the split female subjectivity in the context of patriarchal expectations of women.

World, Girard sets forth a dynamic of desire predicated on the relationship between a model-ideal and disciple-subject, both entities striving for a coveted object in a struggle that ends with certain destruction. Transposed to the cinematic universes of the two films, this doubling effect – in its blurring of the distinctions between self and other, familiar and uncanny – compromises the identities of not only the diegetic figures but also the stars who embody them.

Defining the double: from Freud to Girard

Freud's 1919 essay on "The Uncanny" in literature is the text perhaps most closely associated with the notion of doubles. In his article (expanding upon the ideas of Otto Rank), Freud describes the creation of the double as a kind of residual trace of primary narcissism, the construction of another being as "an insurance against the destruction of the ego" in a "doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self" (*SE XVII* 234 – 235). In its very immortality, however, the alter ego bears a force and agency all its own, and distinguishes itself from the original subjectivity that invoked it. Once the phase of primary narcissism has passed, the reappearance of such a figure signals an uncanny return to a forgotten time. As Freud remarks, "The 'double' has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons" (236).

In 1949, with Lacan's conceptualization of *le stade du miroir*, the double found a new guise in the form of the ideal *moi*, the reflected counterpart of the subject's real *je*. Lacan writes that in that

first, fundamental moment of *méconnaissance* between the *je* and the *moi*, the subject perceives an image of fully-realized power and totality – an image from which subsequent visions of the ultimate self (however ephemeral) emerge throughout the subject’s lifetime. Citing the mirror apparatus as the channel through which the subject gains access to that *imago* in daily life, Lacan also briefly references its ability to invoke the appearance of the double and ensuing “psychical realities” (77). He writes of the mirror stage as “a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation” (78); that is, in so engaging with the *moi* of the mirror, the subject takes part in a fiction of self-discovery outlining a trajectory from incapacity to longed-for authority. As Kaja Silverman notes, however, the subject maintains a “profoundly ambivalent” relationship with that reflected entity, the other self that is alternately loved for its promise of ideality and resented for its elusiveness (*Subject* 158).

With the work of psychoanalytic theorists like Christian Metz, the mirror stage has become a classic framework for explaining the spectator’s investment in and engagement with film. In *The Imaginary Signifier*, Metz even alludes to the notion of the double/*moi* figure in describing the audience’s relationship to the movie star in contrast to the diegetic character portrayed by that actor/actress. Temporarily reverting to the Imaginary and recognizing the mirage of ideality, the spectator relates to the movie

star as “still a character, and a fabulous one, itself fictional: with the best of his [the spectator’s] parts” (67). Interestingly, Metz also alludes to a double nature within cinema itself. He describes a “fundamental disavowal” at work within film that creates a dimension of ambiguity in its projection and reception: “I watch it, but it doesn’t watch me watching it. Nevertheless, it knows that I am watching it. But it doesn’t want to know” (94). That is, the “institution,” or greater discourse, that produces the film functions with an awareness of its exhibitionist qualities; while the film itself, or the “text,” remains aloof from its audience and contained within itself. For Metz, it stands as “a beautiful closed object...whose contours remain intact and which cannot therefore be torn open into an inside and an outside, into a subject capable of saying ‘Yes!’” (94 – 95).

As discussed extensively in the introduction to this project, in both *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man* and *The Stars* Edgar Morin resists such a division between the spectator and the film, especially in his discussion of the movie star-as-double to the spectator. Though he does not explicitly refer to psychoanalytic texts, Morin discusses the spectator’s innate spiritual and psychological need to relate to the star as a transcendent version of the self:

It is the misery of need, the mean and anonymous life that wants to enlarge itself to the dimensions of life in the movies. The imaginary life of the screen is the product of this genuine need; the star is its projection. (*The Stars* 81)

Far from a shallow reflection of the spectator's idle fantasies or a self-contained object, the star as described by Morin represents "the fantastic outline of the construction of man *by* man" (emphasis mine; *The Cinema* 26). He remarks that the movies are "machines for doubling life," and as such they offer an actor or actress whom the audience – through the process of projection-identification – may "invest...with magic potentialities" (*The Stars* 82) of immortality. Attributing to the real spectator the power of creation and consumption of the ideal, Morin declares that "veritable transfers take place between the soul of the spectator and the spectacle on the screen" (95) in the process of rendering the on-screen figure a divine entity.

Yet for Girard, the double represents not an immortal, transcendent entity, but a necessary figure in the fundamentally mimetic nature of desire. As he notes in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, desire is "the mimetic crisis in itself...the acute mimetic rivalry with the other" (288). He goes on to set forth the paradigm of a model-disciple relationship in which a subject, or disciple, longs for an object purely because it is already desired or possessed by the model-as-ideal (413). According to Girard, the model further frustrates the disciple's desire by issuing a "double imperative": "Taken as model, imitate me; and as rival, do not imitate me" (291). This paradoxical manifesto of the model-disciple

dynamic foreshadows the further collapse of distinction between the two entities, as Girard relates:

[The model] imitates his own desire, through the intermediary of the disciple. The disciple thus becomes model to his own model, and the model, reciprocally, becomes the disciple of his own disciple. In the last resort, there are no genuine differences left between the two...or...their desires...These vanishing differences are nothing more than interruptions in reciprocity...In rivalry, everyone occupies all the positions, one after another and then simultaneously, and there are no longer any distinct positions. (299)

With a focus on the threatening, aggressive aspects of the mimetic condition, Girard here recalls the ambivalence of the rapport between the *je* and *moi* in Lacan's reading of the mirror stage; yet Girard's examination of eerily dissolving parameters of identity bespeaks a closer affinity with the more expressly uncanny elements of the double as described by Freud. Extending Freud's conception of a psychic realm in which the ego and its double confront each other as separate entities, Girard presents a world in which the two are inextricably linked in a nightmarish chaos. Acting as both the self and the other, the model and the disciple, the subject exists within a dimension of violence and destruction.

In cinematic terms, Girard's conceptualization of the double recalls Laura U. Marks's distinction between haptic and optical identification.³¹ Though certainly haptic visuality does not lead to the dark disorder described by Girard, its flux between "identification

³¹ It should again be noted that Marks focuses her haptic analyses on alternative cinematic works whose inter-cultural/national concerns diverge significantly from the extra- and intra-diegetic preoccupations of classic, studio-era Hollywood.

and immersion” nonetheless signals a collapse of the strict dichotomy between viewing subject and viewed object that characterizes optical visibility (*Skin* 188, 162). In its ability to “mudd[y] intersubjective boundaries,” haptic visibility calls for a comprehensive sensorial proximity to the film rather than a detachment borne of a conquering gaze (188). In order to accomplish this interaction with the film, Marks declares, “an embodied and mimetic” awareness of the cinematic text as a subjective object must take place (190). She extends this conceptualization of mimesis to note that the haptic perspective “presses up to the object and takes its shape. Mimesis is a form of representation based on getting close enough to the other thing to become it” (*Touch* xiii). That is, the spectator’s phenomenological investment in the subjective presence of the cinematic entity evokes an empathy effect, a *doubling* of sensual awareness from the screen to the audience’s own body. Rejecting the divisive role-playing (subject/object, master/disciple) of traditional visibility, Marks’s conception of cinematic mimesis bespeaks instead an exaltation of the co-subjective existential experience of film and spectator. In language further reminiscent of Girard’s own, Marks writes, “[H]aptic visibility attempts to bring [the other] close, in a look that is so intensely involved with the presence of the other that it cannot take the step back to discern difference” (*Skin* 191). Marks writes, then, of vanishing differences between the film and its audience.

Such an approach to cinema is especially appropriate for *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven*, two films whose respective “looks” (the former’s composition of velvety shadows and shimmering grays; the latter’s kaleidoscopic Technicolor tones) inspire a reverie of sensorial impressions. Martine Beugnet has commented upon the “ambiguity at the heart of corporeal cinema, between the pleasures of sensual communion and the terror of self-integrity decomposing” (*Cinema* 68); and truly, hapticity presents a visual parallel to the questions of over-identification and ominous captivation that haunt the narratives. For in the lives of Mildred and Ellen, the matter of “vanishing differences” represents not an abstraction but an actual danger to the narcissistic investments they maintain in their respective idealities. Though contrasting in their approach to the doubles with whom they engage – Mildred driven to make Veda a perfect version of herself, Ellen obsessed with Ruth as a rival for her husband’s love – both women experience a deterioration of the self as their preoccupations with the mimetic counterparts intensify. Yet with the unique sensory potentiality of these two movies, the haptic approach ultimately enables the transformation of sinister diegetic concerns into an expansive interplay between film and spectator.

Reflected on the extra-diegetic level, the notion of vanishing differences translates into an uncanny shift of power within the balance of star presences. As the distinction between star (“model”)

and co-star (“disciple”) collapses through the stylistic depiction of the interaction between Joan Crawford and Ann Blyth, Gene Tierney and Jeanne Crain, the issue of usurpation that haunts the narrative finds embodiment in the conflicting forms of the actresses themselves. In so exploring the fatal facets of mimetic desire and rivalry, *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven* reveal that stars of classic Hollywood are not, to paraphrase Metz, “beautiful closed objects” inviolate in their self-containment. Rather, the leading ladies and the heroines they embody occupy a fragile dimension of ideality, one vulnerable to the intrusion of a double – and, at the same time, open to a redemptive haptic visibility.

II.

The shadow of the double: Joan Crawford and Mildred Pierce

I never go outside unless I look like Joan Crawford the movie star. If you want to see the girl next door, go next door. – Joan Crawford

The success of *Mildred Pierce* and its enduring status as a Hollywood classic owes much to the performance of Joan Crawford in the leading role. As the film fluctuates between the modes of melodrama and *noir*, Crawford provides an anchoring presence, her signature austere glamour sustaining its impact throughout Mildred’s various roles as put-upon wife and mother, successful businesswoman, and woman scorned. For the duration of her career, Crawford herself explored a variety of personas, crafting a number of images as “Joan Crawford the movie star.” First gaining fame in the

1920s as an embodiment of the pleasure-seeking excesses associated with the flapper, Crawford proceeded to transform her identity throughout the decades in order to sustain her popularity in Hollywood: In the 1930s, whilst under contract to Metro-Goldwyn Mayer Studios, Crawford modeled herself as a glamorous working-girl in films like *Grand Hotel* (Edmund Goulding, 1932), *Mannequin* (Frank Borzage, 1937) and *The Women* (George Cukor, 1939); and in the 1940s, she once again shifted her image towards that of a severe leading lady. In films like *Mildred Pierce* (for which she won an Academy Award – beating Tierney, who was nominated for *Leave Her to Heaven*), *Humoresque* (Jean Negulesco, 1946) and *Daisy Kenyon* (Otto Preminger, 1947), Crawford portrays the kind of self-made, “superwoman” heroines theorized by Molly Haskell: “a woman who...has a high degree of intelligence...but instead of exploiting her femininity, adopts male characteristics in order to enjoy male prerogatives” (214). The last years of Crawford’s career (with the exception of Robert Aldrich’s successful 1962 thriller *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*) were marred by low-budget horror films that helped lend a camp sensibility to her persona. These final films aside, Crawford is today acknowledged as an archetype of the classic Hollywood star, a driven actress consumed by what Richard Dyer describes as the “total slogging away at all aspects of her image” (*Heavenly Bodies* 7).



Crawford, from *Grand Hotel*. Crawford in *Mildred Pierce*.

Yet at the time of the making of *Mildred Pierce*, long before Crawford would become a ubiquitous near-cliché of golden-age stardom, the actress found herself at a low-point in her career. After being released from her MGM contract, Crawford fell into obscurity for several years and had to campaign mightily for the role of Mildred, even offering to appear in a screen-test to prove her ability (Chandler 167). According to film historian Thomas Schatz, Warner Bros. leading actresses Bette Davis, Rosalind Russell, and Barbara Stanwyck – and even comparatively minor stars like Ida Lupino – were all favored for the part over Crawford (417). Indeed, in considering the comparisons to and rivalries with other female stars that haunted the actress throughout her career, it could be argued that the concept of the double provides a particularly appropriate framework for discussing Crawford's time in Hollywood. From the very beginning of her career at MGM, Crawford struggled for dramatic roles and studio dominance with leading lady Norma Shearer, a top star and the wife of production chief Irving Thalberg;

one of her first appearances on-screen, in fact, was as Shearer's double in a 1925 film entitled *Lady of the Night* (Chandler 38). The most famous of such rivalries, however, was Crawford's feud with Bette Davis. With both women seeking to prove their respective dominance as dramatic actresses and box-office attractions, Crawford and Davis's mutual resentment endured for decades as they attacked each other's talent, looks, and lifestyle. *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*, with its recounting of a grotesque jealousy between two sisters and former stars, captured on-screen the legendary enmity between the women.

But in contemporary culture, Joan Crawford's name remains synonymous with *Mommie Dearest*, the title of a 1978 memoir written by her daughter, Christina. Recounting childhood abuse and her mother's fanatical obsession with her career, Christina Crawford's book (later made into a 1981 film starring Faye Dunaway) presents the actress as a monstrous perversion of the maternal figure envisioned in *Mildred Pierce* and, indeed, in Crawford's own self-constructed mythology. In an article released after the making of the film, Crawford declared, "I was eager to accept this chance to portray a mother who has to fight against the temptation to spoil her child. As I have two adopted children, I felt I could understand Mildred" (in LaValley 49). Years later, upon learning that Christina was in the process of writing *Mommie Dearest* (published after the star's death), Crawford would speak of her

daughter in different terms: “I’ve come to think that what she has wanted is to be me. Or at least to have what I have. I wanted to share everything I had with her...” (in Chandler 276). Distinctly recalling both the conflict between Mildred and Veda and Girard’s paradigm of the model-obstacle, Crawford’s words describe an off-screen, real-life mimetic rivalry that has surpassed the fame of *Mildred Pierce* itself.

Ultimately, then, Crawford established her identity as a star both in relation to and in spite of her various doubles – whether they appeared as contemporaries whose talent and success consistently shadowed Crawford’s own, or the daughter who (claimed to) hold up a mirror to the actress’s true nature. Even in comments like the oft-quoted, “If you want to see the girl next door, go next door,” Crawford deliberately placed herself in opposition to the spectre of the other as she “slogged away” at the formation of her public image. Struggling and striving to maintain her fame, Crawford lived out a “success story” reminiscent of that of Mildred Pierce herself – an affinity that would have certainly informed her performance in a darker representation of Morin’s assertion that “actor and role mutually determine each other. The star is more than an actor incarnating characters, he incarnates *himself in them*, and they become incarnate in him” (*The Stars* 28).

Commenting upon the vexed interplay between Crawford-as-*Mommie Dearest* and Crawford-as-Mildred, Albert J. LaValley

remarks that “in the last analysis...*Mildred Pierce* is an icon of Joan Crawford’s life” (49). Certainly the film’s first close-up of Crawford establishes the significance of *Mildred Pierce* as a central moment in her career as a star, introducing a dramatic sensibility that Crawford would call upon for the remainder of her career as a leading lady. After the opening sequence depicting Monte’s murder, there is a dissolve to Mildred/Crawford as she walks on a pier in the misty night, dressed in the accoutrements of 1940s elegance – fur coat with broad shoulder pads, hat, and high-heels. But Mildred’s glamour belies the devastated expression on her face, which the camera captures in close-up as she looks over the railing of the pier into the churning ocean. With Max Steiner’s score reaching a crescendo on the soundtrack, Mildred considers suicide in a moment of anguish that allows the audience, in turn, to contemplate both character and star in this defining shot.

As diegetic heroine, Mildred here looks self-sacrificing and almost-beatific, the drops of rain on her cheeks blending with tears from her mournful eyes; as star, Crawford appears as the most refined version of herself, her severe visage purged of its harsh angles through the aureole of studio backlighting. The duration of the close-up, moreover, allows Crawford to display what would become her signature dramatic technique in later films like *Humoresque* and *The Damned Don’t Cry* (Vincent Sherman, 1950) – the shifting from unutterable melancholy to grim determination in literally the blink of

an eye. Far from the flapper or tough working-girl, the Joan Crawford incarnated in *Mildred Pierce* is an affectedly noble woman of the world.

Joyce Nelson describes these first shots of Mildred as a function of the “false suture” effect of the film itself, appearing as they do immediately after the opening images of Monte’s death and in this way implicating her as the murderer (451).³² Yet even as they effectively confuse the narrative sequence-of-events, the introductory shots of Mildred/Crawford also offer a false representation of Crawford’s depiction in the remainder of the film. Placing the actress in a realm of glorious solitude and focusing upon her as a figure of singular dramatic and visual impact (like Metz’s “beautiful closed object”), the close-ups seem to presage a monological showcase for Crawford-as-star in the remainder of the movie. What ensues, however, is a film that off-sets this apex of Crawford’s star presence through the deliberate construction of Ann Blyth, a starlet who found her greatest success in *Mildred Pierce*, as an equally affecting double for the actress. Close readings of key scenes between Mildred/Crawford and Veda/Blyth reveal not only the arc of destruction and desire within the diegesis, but also an extra-diegetic process of displacement and, indeed, vanishing differences between

³² In his study of *Mildred Pierce*, David Bordwell further notes that the opening moments of the film offer two narrative “paths”: one for “the trusting spectator, who assumes that Mildred is the killer,” and the other for “the skeptical viewer, who will not take her guilt for granted” (140). What Bordwell implicitly describes, then, is a “double” for the direction of the diegesis itself.

the women in an uncanny realignment of cinematic model and disciple.

Mildred: I'd do anything for those kids, do you understand? Anything.

At the end of the film, before the police lead Veda away, Mildred holds her daughter's shoulders in a desperate grip and cries, "Darling, I'm sorry...I did the best I could" – a plaintive declaration that articulates Mildred's anguish at her inability to produce the charmed life that she believes Veda should have had. More than an apology from a mother to a daughter, Mildred's words resonate with the distress of a servant pleading for forgiveness from her master. In these final moments, Mildred must admit failure to the revered model-figure – the child who would succeed where Mildred failed, and through whom she too could gain access to a more privileged, cultured existence – to whom she spent her life paying homage. In so worshipping her daughter, Mildred epitomizes the account of parental narcissism offered by Freud in "On Narcissism":

[Parents] are under a compulsion to ascribe every perfection to the child – which sober observation would find no occasion to do...The child shall have a better time than his [*sic*] parents; he shall not be subject to the necessities which they have recognized as paramount in life...The child shall fulfill those wishful dreams of the parents which they never carried out – the boy shall become a great man and a hero is his father's place, and the girl shall marry a prince as a tardy compensation for her mother. (*SE XIV 91*)

According to Freud, the overwhelming love parents feel for their children represents a return to the latent narcissistic desires that have lingered since the primary narcissism of their childhoods; by

projecting their hopes and dreams of infallibility onto the child, the parents may suspend the recognition that their own egos are vulnerable to “the laws of nature and of society” (ibid). Moreover, the narcissistic woman regards the child she has borne as an extension of the self, an object upon which she may project a total, consuming passion (89). Ultimately, the narcissistic parent avoids an awareness of the child’s reality in an effort to realize his/her potential ideality – and it is with this channeling of narcissistic investment that Mildred creates Veda as her ideal double, as an early exchange between Mildred and Bert evidences:

Bert: The trouble is, you’re trying to buy love from those kids and it won’t work...Veda has to have a piano and lessons and fancy dresses...and Kay...she’s going to become a ballet dancer so you can feel proud of yourself.

Mildred: All right, what of it? What if I do want them to amount to something? I’d do anything for those kids, do you understand? Anything.

In reading Veda as Mildred’s own deliberately constructed ideal double, one perceives a divergence from the romantic narcissism presented in *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year* (in which the woman’s love for herself is placed in opposition to conventions of love between men and women) towards a maternal narcissism that longs for the daughter in her guise as the reflected realization of the mother’s desires. Throughout *Mildred Pierce*, Mildred identifies with Veda not simply as an incarnation of the Lacanian *moi*, but as a more refined vision, even version, of herself:

Veda becomes *elle*, a figure at that much more of a psychic distance for whose love Mildred must prove herself willing to “do anything.” In her study of *Lacan and the Uses of Iconoclasm*, Katharine Swarbrick highlights the significance of the “radical alterity” (7) of the reflected image in the mirror stage; distinctly recalling the language of Girard, Swarbrick describes this entity as “an other which is a master” (ibid) rather than an extension of the subject. In a diegetic parallel, the relationship between Mildred and Veda is not that of an organically sympathetic mother and daughter, but rather of a seeking subject enslaved and enraptured by the remote being, the *elle*, who seems to embody what Swarbrick calls the “permanence and prestige” (ibid) of a longed-for identity.

This dynamic of their rapport reveals itself early in the film, when Mildred assures Veda that she will do all that she can to provide for the family now that Bert has left. As she enters Veda’s bedroom, Mildred’s shadow introduces her presence as it casts itself on the wall behind Veda, who reclines on her bed in the foreground of a medium shot. The long take continues as the camera pans to the left and right, following Mildred as she enters the frame and moves about the room, finally settling next to Veda in what tightens into a close medium shot. There is then a cut to a close medium shot of Veda, with the back of Mildred’s head to the left of the frame, as the girl suggests that her mother marry Wally, an unapologetically sleazy family friend who, in the preceding scene, propositioned Mildred.

Following a cut to a reverse shot, Mildred demurs at Veda's idea, remarking that she would not marry without love; yet Veda persists, maintaining that Wally's wealth would more than compensate – causing Mildred to sit up abruptly, a motion mirrored exactly by Veda, as she utters in astonishment, “Does a new house mean that much to you that you would trade *me* for *it*?”

Veda immediately assuages her mother's distress, cozying up to her and saying, “It's just that there are so many things that I – that *we* should have and haven't got.” The camera pans closer to capture this intimate mother-daughter tableau as Mildred holds her daughter close and replies, “I want you to have nice things, and you will have...I'll get you...anything you want.” Though brief, this dialogue definitively establishes an essential flaw in Mildred's relationship with Veda: Mildred misses the telling slip of pronouns in Veda's statement (“that I – that *we*”) that reveals the ruthless self-interest of the girl's nature. Unaware that the child she worships is not a model of a finer life but of amorality and greed, Mildred places herself further in thrall to Veda and her seductive machinations.

As Pamela Robertson points out, the ominous undertones of this exchange become altogether apparent at the close of the sequence itself when Veda, framed in a close-up, looks after her mother as she leaves the room and smiles knowingly (46). Significantly, Veda's first appearance in the film also highlights her lingering gaze, as the camera holds on her looking after Mildred as she is led away by the

police for questioning after the discovery of Monte's murder.

Robertson describes such moments in *Mildred Pierce* as indicative of "the film's insistence upon its freedom from a spatial attachment to Mildred" (46) and the discourse conveyed in her voice-over, thus revealing the tenuous nature of her authorial presence. This privileging of Veda's look also marks her as what Stephen Heath has termed "a kind of perspective within a perspective system" that guides the spectator in his/her reading of the film (44) – a position of power that further undermines Mildred's own as ostensible enunciator of the film.

Moreover, Robertson references Veda's similarities to the *femme fatale* archetype and likens Mildred's feelings towards her wayward daughter to that of a blindly devoted lover in true *noir* fashion (49). Indeed, Veda's subversion through an unsettling gaze places her in that tradition of *noir* femininity, showing a particular affinity with *Double Indemnity*'s (Billy Wilder, 1944) Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) and her lingering look after fall-guy Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) has convinced her husband to sign the insurance papers that will lead to his murder. Undoing the sense of intimacy seen in the immediately preceding two-shots, the women's respective moments of solitary contemplation foreshadow the eventual destruction of their unknowing companions. Yet through the subtle unraveling of this diegetic closeness, an uneasy complicity between spectator and character develops and complicates

the former's relationship to the filmic world. Now aware of Veda's true nature, the audience no longer shares Mildred's ignorance and, instead, finds itself aligned with a far more sinister point of identification: Veda herself.

According to the psychoanalytic model of identification set forth by Metz, the spectator relates to the film on both a primary and secondary level. The first of these implies an identification with the camera itself, the all-seeing subject that evokes a state of "pure visual capacity" (96 – 97); as Inez Hedges elaborates, this register highlights an unconscious immersion in the pleasure derived from the visual and aural components of the film-as-spectacle, without a consideration for the narrative (209). In this way, as Beugnet remarks in describing the "cinema of sensation," the audience realizes that the film is "'think[ing]' in moving images and sound" (60). In contrast, secondary identification derives from an engagement with the diegetic structure (the setting forth of a sequence-of-events and characters) of the film and its formal components (such as continuity editing and point-of-view shots) (Hedges 211). Heath has commented upon the significance of the diegesis to the suturing, or interweaving, of the spectator's subjectivity with that of the film, referring to narrative itself as the ultimate means of "set[ting] the space of the frame to be followed and 'read' " (18, 36). For Heath, the techniques of filmic production (including shot/reverse shots, camera angles, and soundtracks) are all

functions of “narrativization,” or the continuous evolution of the “seen” images into a diegetic “scene” that engages the subjectivity of the viewer (37, 51).

In relating these dual processes of identification to the figure of the star, Hedges reads the actor/actress as a fundamental element in the registers of both the “seen” and the “scene.” Recalling the sensorial investment of haptic visuality, she notes that the aesthetic qualities of the star (or “screen character”) invite an immersion in the spectacle of the film, while the diegetic character embodied by that star furthers the equally riveting narrative trajectory (210). With this in mind, then, the spectator’s identification with Veda represents a wholly unsettling shift: Linked with Veda-as-diegetic-character on the secondary level, the spectator realizes the futility of Mildred’s projections of ideality long before she herself does; and on the primary level, this awareness translates into a recognition of Blyth herself as a mediating force in the audience’s engagement with Crawford as “screen character.” No longer relating to Crawford as the striking, autonomous figure seen in her first close-up, the spectator instead senses the precariousness of her star presence with the closing shot of this sequence: While Blyth’s face fills the foreground, Crawford exits the shot and reappears only briefly in the background – as a mere shadow flitting across the wall.

Monte: You’re very much indeed like your mother.
Veda: Yes.

The montage that opens the next key scene between mother and daughter highlights the undertones of instability that now shade the representation of both Mildred and Crawford. In an expression of what Bruce F. Kavin terms a “mindscreen,” or “the field of the mind’s eye” (10), brief images of Kay dancing in a ballet costume and Veda singing by a piano flash on the screen as Mildred recalls in voice-over how her work as a waitress enabled her to afford these luxuries for her daughters. Yet the dreamscape of these projections of Mildred’s subjectivity sharply contrasts with the more homely reality that greets her in the subsequent scene: Kay, dressed as Carmen Miranda, impersonates the musical star’s dance routine while Veda sings and accompanies her on the piano. Moments later, Mildred and Veda share a bitter dialogue about the waitressing job that Veda believes “degrades” the family. Where the first significant encounter between the women favors extended two-shots in order to capture the mother and daughter’s apparent intimacy, in this scene a rapid shot/reverse shot pattern highlights the increasing tension in their exchange, which reaches a climax when Mildred slaps Veda across the face.



The first conflict.

There is undoubtedly a focus on performativity in this sequence, seen not only in Kay and Veda's actual performances but also in the inclusion of Hollywood inter-textuality in the form of the reference to Carmen Miranda. The initial close-up of Crawford in the shot/reverse shot series further heightens this sense of role-playing, and directly gestures towards the actress's own place in the discourse of the Hollywood persona. Much in the same way that the close-up of Tracy/Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story* helped to create a self-conscious construction of stardom, Crawford's close-up belies her character's decidedly unglamorous plight: The lighting is diffused, its radiance softening the harsh, almost masculine set of Crawford's features. Yet where the design of *The Philadelphia Story* meditated upon Tracy/Hepburn as a star presence, the appearance of Veda/Blyth in the subsequent shot undercuts the solitary glory of Mildred/Crawford's close-up – a shift that serves to highlight Crawford's strong resemblance to Blyth. Rather than function as a signal of unqualified stardom, the close-up in this shot/reverse shot

exchange serves as a means of framing Blyth in her burgeoning strength as a star presence rivaling Crawford's own. These shots, then, make literal Girard's assertion that "in rivalry, everyone occupies all the positions, one after another and then simultaneously" (299). Just as this sequence uncovers the sheer fantasy of Mildred's mindscreen of a longed-for lifestyle, it also reveals the space of the close-up to be an uncertain dimension open to appropriation.

The collapse of the boundaries distinguishing star/co-star and Mildred/Veda, as well as the subsequent unraveling of the audience's sutured identification, recall the concept of the *chora* theorized by Julia Kristeva. Taken from Plato's term, the *chora* represents the original, pre-linguistic space existing between mother and infant, a psychic location in which the pulsations of vocal and kinetic rhythms constitute a register of communication and connection. Through the dominance of the maternal figure, the *chora* envelops the infant in the fulfillment of the instinctual drives, thus satisfying his/her primary narcissistic needs.³³ It is, as Kristeva writes, "a period of indistinction between 'same' and 'other,' infant and mother, as well as between 'subject' and 'object' " ("Place Names" 284). Upon the child's ascension into language, however, the *chora* recedes and the child-as-subject takes his/her place within the symbolic structure already delimited by patriarchal society – even as the haunting memory of this pre-Oedipal attachment remains. As Kristeva notes

³³ Kristeva discusses this concept extensively in her works "Place Names," "Revolution in Poetic Language," and *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.

in *Powers of Horror*, the *chora* is indeed a formidable spectre. What begins as a site of need and fulfillment, immediacy and proximity, and the dissolution of parameters between mother and infant degenerates into the abject, or that which “disturbs identity, system, order” and “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4).

Where the narrative bond between Mildred and Veda represents the *choric* degeneration of intimacy into insidiousness, the greater filmic entity itself provides moments of haptic unity between the on- and off-screen dimensions. In contrast to the negative potentiality of the *chora*, haptic visuality offers what Marks calls a “dynamic play” (*Skin* 188) between film and spectator – and, moreover, an alternative maternal paradigm. Specifically relating this approach to cinema to the rapport between mother and child, Marks describes a perspective that is “labile, able to move between identification and immersion” rather than grounded in the “phallic economy” of optical visuality (*ibid*). In the scenes between Mildred and Veda, then, the haptic gaze provides a liberating, ocular respite from the demands of a drama ever-intensifying in tension and abjection. Allowing the audience to “grasp,” as it were, the shifting on-screen identities of Mildred and Veda, Crawford and Blyth through an appreciation of the movie’s sensual evolution, hapticity transforms a *choric* problem into a sensory possibility.

In her outlining of the abject, Kristeva describes those beings who embody the concept: “The traitor, the liar...the killer who claims

he is a savior” (4). One could arguably add Veda/Blyth to this cast of characters – the daughter who willfully destroys her mother, the co-star who usurps the place of the star. But where this dissolution of boundaries resonates with amorality and villainy, the bearer of a haptic perspective finds that his/her inability to “take the step back to discern difference” (Marks *Skin* 191) in the scheme of a shot provides an immersive interplay with the film itself. Drawn into the chromatic continuum of grays and blacks that form the body of the movie, the gaze of the audience moves fluidly across the screen comprehending *both* the narrative implications and sensory reverberations of the cinematic being. In these diverging affective events – the unsettling intertwining of Mildred and Veda, Crawford and Blyth; the pleasure of immediate intimacy with the film as it shares its existential intelligence – the experience of *Mildred Pierce* appeals to the spectator’s dual awareness of the abject and the rapturous.

As the film continues and Veda’s selfishness increases commensurately with the success of Mildred’s restaurant business, the qualities of the abject that underlie their relationship become violently apparent. Now with the financial panache that enables her to mingle with socialites (a montage depicting Veda’s new role as “a young lady with expensive tastes” captures her at a polo game, for example), Veda meets and charms a wealthy man whose mother disapproves of the match. The two elope, but when family pressures cause the marriage to be annulled, Veda fakes a pregnancy in order to

obtain a financial settlement. Though Mildred has long underestimated the extent of her daughter's avarice, she realizes the force of Veda's ruthless ambitions in the scene after the young woman receives her money.

After the revelation that Veda has lied about her pregnancy, the two women stand face-to-face in a medium shot that all but insists upon the spectator's acknowledgement of their resemblance; a sameness that, like the bullet holes in the mirror, becomes a harbinger of danger and instability. In her article "Duplicity in *Mildred Pierce*," Pam Cook briefly notes that the resemblance between Mildred/Crawford and Veda/Blyth evidences Veda's position as a narcissistic object choice for Mildred (80); yet here, the women (both dressed in severe black suits, with their dark hair pulled back from their faces) appear not as refined reflections but as opposing doubles in a warped mirror, confronting each other as threatening counterparts to their respective selves. Veda articulates her constant striving to liberate herself from her mother and "chickens and pies and kitchens and everything that smells of grease"; while Mildred regards the daughter she had idealized and utters, "I think I'm really seeing you for the first time in my life, and you're cheap and horrible." As a brief shot/reverse shot pattern takes place, Naomi Scheman's contention that Mildred and Veda share an inability to "take their eyes off each other" (87) is made manifest – trapping both within a reciprocal relay of contemptuous and disappointed gazes,

with the back of each of their heads alternately appearing as an eerie trace of stark darkness within their respective close-ups. Even as Crawford's star presence within the body of the film becomes all the more malleable and impermanent, the figure of Blyth compensates for that diminishing in an uncanny balancing act. Rather than construct a formidable, otherworldly star presence, the shot plan of this scene offers the spectator an immersion into the corruption of ideality.



The doubles.

Further, the question of Veda's false pregnancy becomes especially significant in light of the fact that earlier in the film, Kay dies while Mildred begins her love affair with Monte Beragon – a turn of events that creates a direct cause-and-effect between Mildred's decidedly un-maternal pursuit of romantic/sexual fulfillment and the child's passing.³⁴ With her uncomplicated good nature, Kay stood as a direct counterpoint to Veda's insidious greed,

³⁴ See, for example, June Sochen (8) and Pamela Robertson's (50) respective articles.

as evidenced in a telling dialogue between Mildred and Bert several sequences before:

Bert: Kay is twice the girl that Veda is and always will be. She thinks you're wonderful.

Mildred: Maybe that's why I keep trying to please Veda.

Bert: You'll always get kicked around, Mildred.

Now clothed in somber black attire, in this scene Mildred (now undoubtedly "kicked around") appears in mourning for the loss of *both* her daughters – the one who died and the one whose amorality renders her a cipher, a figure composed only of the projections of Mildred's narcissistic desires. Inasmuch as Veda's substance and definition lies in her identity as a dystopic realization of Mildred's own narcissism, she could not, in truth, bear a child. As Mary Ann Doane notes of the *femme fatale*, that figure is "the antithesis of the maternal – sterile, barren" (*Femmes* 2). Unlike the "nice, normal little kid" that Kay was, Veda is only *elle*, the warped model to Mildred's disciple.

In further discussing her notion of *Mildred Pierce*'s "false suture," Nelson remarks that the reflection-imagery created through the two-shots serves to substantiate the act of "metonymical substitution of Mildred for Veda" that began with the shot of Mildred that followed Monte's murder (455). This scene, however, also calls attention to the process of substitution of Blyth for Crawford – or, more precisely, the steady usurpation of the model-star as the

disciple-co-star is crafted in Crawford's image. In a variation on Morin's assertion that the on-screen star "take[s] [the audience's] souls and...bodies...adjust[ing] them to [her] size and...passions" (*The Cinema* 148) in order to become the spectator's divine double, here Crawford loses part of her star presence in a cinematic manifestation of Mildred's own willingness to sacrifice herself for Veda. Morin reminds his reader that where the star "needs [the spectator's] substance in order to live," the members of her audience have their own "lifeblood [and] substance" (148); yet in a reciprocal interplay between the extra- and intra-diegetic, Mildred and Crawford surrender part of their respective "lifeblood" to ensure Veda and Blyth's ideality.

The penultimate sequence of the film, in which Mildred discovers that Veda has murdered Monte (in an action that, as LaValley comments, allows Veda to "act...out her mother's revenge and assume...her guilt" (12)), emphasizes this sense of interchange. Facing her mother in a final shot/reverse shot series, Veda/Blyth dominates the shots as she calls upon the audience's recognition of her "screen character" as a fully realized ideal double for Mildred/Crawford. With a flower in her hair, an evening dress, and firelight eerily illuminating the frame of her close-up, Blyth stands in the opalescent radiance created by the merging of myriad shades of gray and projects much of the star presence that one would have associated with Crawford – whose own close-up is laden with

shadows, suffusing the frame and the actress's person with a velvety dimensionality. Truly, Veda/Blyth seems an almost self-conscious construction of beauty and feminine desirability. Far from the "common frump" that she has accused her mother of being, here Veda – like Blyth herself – is a young girl brilliantly playing the part of a *femme fatale*. Though at first Mildred insists that she will call the police and force her daughter to accept the consequences, Veda yet again appeals to her mother's blind love: "Think what will happen if they find me...I'll change, I promise I will...Just give me another chance. It's your fault I'm the way I am."



Master and disciple.

Later, Mildred concedes that "maybe, in a way, it was my fault," assuming culpability in a way that typifies Girard's contention that the subject "will take the model's side, secretly justifying the hostile treatment...and interpreting it as a special condemnation that he [*sic*] probably deserves" (296). In a last, desperate effort to preserve the sanctity of the narcissistic reflection, the *elle*, that she has long nurtured and desired as ideal, Mildred once again cedes to

the power of the double and attempts to take the blame for her daughter's actions. She attempts, moreover, to definitively take the place of the now-tarnished model and, in so doing, exonerate her from the destructive reality of her crime. Willing to sacrifice herself in order to save Veda, even after recognizing that she "is cheap and horrible" – what the spectator has known all along – Mildred fulfils Girard's prediction for the subject trapped in a mimetic crisis:

"Desire has...a logic of gambling...[T]he luckless player does not give up; as the odds get worse, he [*sic*] plays for higher stakes" (298).

In the last moment before the police imprison Veda, Mildred shares a two-shot with her daughter, clutching her arms and declaring that she "did the best [she] could"; staring at her grieving mother impassively, Veda replies, "Don't worry about me, mother. I'll get by." In the pause between these two sentences, there is a cut from the two-shot to a medium shot of Veda turning from Mildred and walking away with the policeman – and in an instance of disquieting continuity, Veda's utterance of the phrase "I'll get by" clearly emits not from the image track (Blyth's mouth does not move) but from the overdubbing of the soundtrack. And perhaps Veda will get by. Indeed, with her voice guiding the momentum of that final sequence, Veda seems to impel the suturing of her final moments on-screen. Instead of instilling within the spectator a sense of kindred subjectivity with the diegetic world, however, Veda's articulation and its disembodied suspension present the aural counterpart to her

lingering look in the first key scene between her and Mildred. In this final affirmation of Veda/Blyth's role as an uncanny point of identification, *she* becomes the enunciator, leaving no question as to the dominance of her will as she commands the voice-over Mildred/Crawford's last semblance of control. The model has, in this moment, effectively destroyed her disciple.

Though the diegesis ends with Mildred's defeat, the paradigm of star presences ultimately restored itself to its original balance after the conclusion of the film: Blyth's career peaked with her role in *Mildred Pierce*, and Crawford would be remembered as one of the most famous actresses in Hollywood history. Yet for Crawford, the identity of "Joan Crawford the movie star" was itself a model-object to covet – a narcissistic construct of ideality that proved to be as fragile as that one to which Mildred herself was devoted. Indeed, just as the spectre of the double qualified Crawford's career and personal life, a misalignment of star and co-star renders her best-known performance an examination of mimetic rivalry between screen presences; an interplay as skewed as the shattered mirror at Monte's beach house.

III.

Excess and identity in *Leave Her to Heaven*

By the middle of *Leave Her to Heaven*, Richard Harland has realized that something is wrong with his marriage to Ellen Berent. Pathologically jealous and possessive, guarding her husband from

family and friends, Ellen quickly reveals herself to be an uncontrollable force far from the glamorous figure with whom Richard had fallen in love. After one of what he calls Ellen's "fit of hysterics," an unsettled Richard asks her mother, "What's *wrong* with Ellen?" Mrs. Berent only replies resignedly, "It's just that she loves too much."

Equally sinister, however, is Ellen's obsession with *being* loved, as she consumes her husband's life with a narcissistic vampirism that gives rise to the aura of excess haunting the entire film: Like *Mildred Pierce*, *Leave Her to Heaven* rejects traditional generic boundaries and finds a place within the genres of both melodrama and *film noir*. Equally significant, however, is its expressionistic palette of Technicolor. In his discussion of the film, Marshall Deutelbaum describes the use of color as "entirely naturalistic, avoiding any unusual tonalities which might call attention to themselves" (164). Though obviously avoiding any blatantly fantastic visuals, the film's intensity of color nevertheless belies the appropriateness of the term "naturalistic." Where dusky grays and inky shadows give visual resonance to the corrupt melodrama of *Mildred Pierce*, cloaking the flesh of Mildred/Crawford and Veda/Blyth in a somber chiaroscuro skin, *Leave Her to Heaven* saturates the screen with a palette of reds, greens, and blues whether in the expanse of naturally-lit exterior

shots or the intimacy of studio interiors.³⁵ Marks has written of the “rich sensory associations” awoken by color film, inspiring a synesthetic relationship to the movie that suggests a deeper phenomenological investment in the visual pleasure of cinema. In the world of *Leave Her to Heaven*, sensorial excess finds embodiment in the figure of Gene Tierney herself, an actress whose striking visage becomes a landscape upon which the disquieting extravagance of Ellen’s desires and the evocative Technicolor spectrum reveals itself.³⁶ Bearing a beauty overwhelming in its intensity and magnetism, Tierney incarnates on-screen the ominous seductiveness that defines Ellen’s nature.

If Joan Crawford represents a Hollywood icon, Tierney stands as an utterly elusive near-enigma of classical cinema. With virtually no critical appraisal of her *oeuvre* as an actress, Tierney’s place in film history seems predicated on her role as the titular heroine of Otto Preminger’s classic *film noir* *Laura* (1944) – though she enjoyed great commercial and critical success in the 1940s with *Heaven Can Wait* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1943), *Dragonwyck* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1946), *The Razor’s Edge* (Edmund Goulding, 1946), and *The Ghost*

³⁵ In contextualizing the color scheme of *Leave Her to Heaven*, Marshall Deutelbaum points out that its Technicolor presentation was a rarity in the early 1940s, when most contemporary dramas were filmed on black-and-white stock. At that time, Technicolor was primarily used in fantasy, historical, or musical films because of its divergence from cinematic conventions of “plausibility and natural appearance” (161).

³⁶ See Martine Beugnet’s definition of the body-landscape in “Close-Up Vision: Re-Mapping the Body in the Work of Contemporary French Women Filmmakers.” *Nottingham French Studies* 45.3. Autumn 2006: 24 – 48.

and *Mrs. Muir* (Mankiewicz, 1947). She began the 1950s with strong dramatic roles in *Night and the City* (Jules Dassin, 1950) and *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (Preminger, 1950); after a severe nervous breakdown in the middle of the decade, however, Tierney all but vanished from the screen, and her career never regained its earlier momentum. In a kind of poetic variation on the alignment between role and star described by Morin, Tierney herself now stands as a figure as removed and distant from both the popular and critical material on classic Hollywood as the haunting portrait of *Laura* with which she is so identified.

Capturing Tierney at the height of her unique beauty – with the famously-feline angles of her eyes and cheekbones, and a slight overbite that off-sets the symmetry of her features – as well as her career, *Leave Her to Heaven* actively plays upon the exoticism that tempers the actress's patrician elegance. As Richard remarks to Ellen in their first conversation, "I can't say you look like anyone I've ever met before." It is, in fact, this "other-ness" underlying Tierney's appeal that the film emphasizes, with Richard commenting on Ellen's appearance, "While I was watching you, exotic words drifted across the mirror of my mind...I thought of *Tales of the Arabian Nights*, of myrrh, and frankincense, and...patchouli." Though Tierney portrays "women of mystery" in *The Shanghai Gesture* (Josef von Sternberg, 1941) and *Sundown* (Henry Hathaway, 1941), it is *Leave Her to Heaven* that casts the actress's remarkable attractiveness as a

disruptive force within the framework of a contemporary American drama. Only two years before, Lubitsch's *Heaven Can Wait* had presented Tierney in Technicolor shades that added a storybook, illustrative quality to the charming period comedy; yet in *Leave Her to Heaven*, the sheer suffusion of vibrant tones craft a contrasting chromatic landscape out of her chestnut hair, bright blue eyes, and red lips. Abandoning the subtleties of black-and-white and the wistful romanticism of her earlier color performance, the Technicolor spectrum of *Leave Her to Heaven* and the character of Ellen Berent awaken an unsettling magnificence in Tierney's physical form.



Heaven Can Wait (with Don Ameche).



Leave Her to Heaven.

Where Tierney's *photogénie*³⁷ provides a nexus point between unsettling beauty and excessive desires, the conventional prettiness of

³⁷Though the term *photogénie* escapes exact definition (as Mary Ann Doane remarks, it is "usually considered to be theoretically incoherent" ("The Close-Up" 89)), Jean Epstein's formulation will found its use in this and subsequent discussions. In "The Photogenic Element," he declares that "*photogénie* is to cinema what colour is to painting and volume to sculpture; the specific element of that art" (24). In the context of this project's exploration of the star's unique filmic

co-star Jeanne Crain presents a screen presence as unassuming and uncomplicated as the character of Ruth herself. Enhancing rather than dominating the overall aesthetic effect of the shots in which she is pictured, Crain acts as what Morin describes as “a mediator...between the fantastic world of dreams and man’s daily life on earth” (*Stars* 25) – that is, a desirable yet accessible paragon of femininity presented for the spectator’s pleasure. One could even describe Crain as an “anacletic”³⁸ presence on the screen: a generous figure whose substance lies in her contribution, her “tending,” to the vision of the film as a whole. Crain consistently cultivated this wholesome appeal in leading roles in films like *State Fair* (Walter Lang, 1945) and *A Letter to Three Wives* (Mankiewicz, 1949), and dramatic turns in *Pinky* (Elia Kazan, 1949); yet with the passage of time, Crain and her pleasant but innocuous persona have become somewhat incidental in the scheme of classic Hollywood cinema.



subjectivity, the subsequent analyses will attempt to extend the concept to include the given actress’s own “specific element” in her relationship to cinema.

³⁸ To recall Freud’s definition, an anacletic individual is that subject who moves beyond a narcissistic investment in him/herself to choose “the woman who feeds [i.e. tends]” or “the man who protects” (*SE XIV* 88, 90) as an object of love.

Publicity still of Jeanne Crain.

Publicity shot of
Crain and Cornel
Wilde from *Leave
Her to Heaven*.

These women, then, share a relationship of doubles not because of any outstanding resemblance in appearance or manner, nor any similarity in their respective diegetic characters. Instead, Crain-as-Ruth and Tierney-as-Ellen face each other as opposing forces on the continuum between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, with the former representing the familiar, unthreatening counterpart to the uncanny quality of the latter's narcissistic magnetism. Certainly the film's stylistic treatment of the actresses – isolating villainess Ellen/Tierney in restrictive close-ups, while placing the innocent Ruth/Crain in medium- and long-shots – highlights this sense of the disparate, and seems to make manifest the traditional understanding of the melodramatic world as one founded on what Peter Brooks describes as “an irreducible manichaeism” (36). Yet underlying the melodramatic elements of *Leave Her to Heaven* is an interest in uncovering the fluidity between the dual poles of good and evil. As Freud remarks in his essay on the uncanny, “*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*” (SE XVII 226); and as the distinction between the two women's identities as *femme fatale* and *ingénue*, star and co-star steadily disintegrates, the film follows

that direction of ambivalence not towards the triumph of good over evil, but the intertwining thereof.

Ellen [to Richard]: I couldn't stand having anyone between us.

In the opening sequences of *Leave Her to Heaven*, the film sets forth the dichotomous relationship between the two women, framing Ellen in her disquieting intensity and Ruth in her mild loveliness. Seated on a train, Ellen initially encounters her future husband – and makes her first appearance on-screen – in a scene that establishes the quality of disequilibrium that will come to shadow her. A series of medium close-ups first introduces Ellen/Tierney, a technique that establishes not only her striking beauty but her unsettling effect on Richard, as well. In a shot-reverse-shot pattern that returns five times to the same medium close-up of a motionless Ellen, she gazes steadily and silently at Richard as he disconcertedly fidgets under her stare. After Richard finally meets her look, Ellen awakens from her reverie and says charmingly, “I’m sorry, I was staring at you, wasn’t I?... You’ll forgive me.” Richard does, of course, forgive Ellen, and even moves from his seat on the train to sit next to (and share the frame of) the fascinating stranger who will become his wife.



Ellen/Tierney's first close-up.

With Richard's own light-hearted demeanor and the cheerful extra-diegetic music that plays in the background of this encounter, the strength of Ellen's unwavering gaze seems alien and out of place. Subverting the traditional Mulveyan paradigm of visual pleasure that aligns active/male and passive/female, Ellen radiates an aggressive sensuality. At the beginning of the sequence, of course, her bold look at Richard does not indicate so much a narcissistic nature but an intent longing; yet as she focuses on Richard with a myopic gaze oblivious to the passing of time or his obvious discomfort, Ellen subtly defines herself as a woman utterly unaware of anything other than her own desires. As Mary Ann Doane notes, the "excessive desire and overpossessiveness" (*Femmes* 27) that will come to characterize Ellen's relationship with Richard establishes itself here. Equally disconcerting in the space of these five relentless close-ups, moreover, is the spectator's awareness of the parallel between Ellen's vision and his/her own. Like Ellen, the audience gazes at the object of its desire – in this moment, Gene Tierney – in mute contemplation;

like Ellen, the audience is suspended within a reverie of visual pleasure: Ellen enthralled by the man whom she has chosen to satisfy her need to be loved, the spectator enthralled by the image of an ideal. Just as Veda and the audience shared a troubling alliance, Ellen here reveals herself as a point of identification that will prove all the more disquieting as the film continues.

Ultimately, this series of close-ups expresses the essential flaw in Ellen's relationship to her world: Consumed by a relentless contemplation of and preoccupation with the object of her desire, Ellen finds no one who can return truly her gaze. Indeed, her impossible search for a passion that will match her own indicates a need for the boundlessness of the *chora* that so characterized the relationship between Mildred and Veda. Yet in a curious and arguably perverse variation on the *choric* bond between mother and child, Ellen directs the cathexis of her pre-Oedipal attachment upon her father – insisting that *he*, the patriarchal figure who should guide the child towards the Oedipal, serve instead as the fundamental source that will satisfy her narcissism. As Ellen later recounts to Richard, “We were inseparable...From the time I was able to walk, we were both happiest when we were together.” Further, she admits that what inspired her initial attraction to Richard was his “most remarkable resemblance” to her father: “Face, voice, manner...it’s uncanny...[They resemble each other] in *every* way.” Ellen’s fanatic projection of her father upon Richard has an eerie moment all its

own, as she scatters her father's ashes in a performance of mourning witnessed by Richard (who, interestingly, does not realize that Ellen is aware of his presence). Immediately after releasing the corporeal remains of her first love-object, Ellen shifts her attention to Richard as a double of her father who will, in turn, gratify her narcissistic needs.

Where Ellen's first scene resonates with the promise of such troubles to come, Ruth appears on-screen in an entirely unobtrusive fashion. Joining Ellen and her mother as they step off of the train in long-shot, at this first glance Ruth only attracts notice because of her proximity to Ellen. Indeed, Ruth almost seems to be a kind of lady-in-waiting to the regal Ellen, whose elegant bearing in a white fur coat completely overshadows Ruth and her drab brown suit. (As Deutelbaum remarks, the women's "differences are expressed as much by the color of their clothes as by their words" (167).) Truly, Ruth might have faded from the tableau entirely, were it not for the ringing tones of her voice as she speaks incidental dialogue and, more significantly, a medium close-up that insists upon the spectator's attention. Following a shot of Ellen and Richard meeting again on the station platform, there is a cut to Ruth's face as she watches the encounter. Raising an eyebrow and looking thoughtfully, almost warily, at the couple, Ruth suddenly transforms from a pleasant ornament to a perceptive subject.



Ellen, Ruth, and Richard (far right).

This shift takes place, however, in the very milieu that the previous sequence had aligned with Ellen: the close-up. Once again highlighting the female gaze, this shot also calls for a moment of identification with a feminine subject – this time, with the woman that Ellen will come to fear as a rival. With a muted comeliness that pales in comparison to the unremitting vibrancy of Ellen/Tierney’s features, Ruth/Crain clearly lacks the commanding presence and beauty of Ellen/Tierney. It is, nonetheless, the very unlikely quality of the former’s occupation of the close-up that enhances the threat of usurpation. In so allowing supporting player Crain-as-Ruth to occupy, however briefly, the space associated with star Tierney-as-Ellen, the film hints at the melding of identities that inevitably occurs in mimetic rivalry. In this way, it also subtly overturns any notion of a strict Manichaeian depiction of Ellen and Ruth. If, as Girard maintains, “there are no...distinct positions” (299) or roles within the

relationship of doubles, there are by extension no distinct positions of morality for the women to occupy.

Further enhancing this sense of ambiguity is the vagueness of the actual relationship between Ellen and Ruth. Though raised as sisters, they are in fact cousins – Ruth remarks to Richard that Mrs. Berent adopted her out of loneliness and alienation from the closeness of Ellen’s bond with her father. Ruth has, then, assumed the role of “daughter” that originally belonged to Ellen; but as the sequences at Back-of-the-Moon, Richard’s country home, make clear, Ellen seeks this exile from her family of origin in order to possess Richard more completely.³⁹ After Richard invites Ruth and Mrs. Berent to Back-of-the-Moon for a surprise visit, Ellen reacts with jealous rage against her family’s intrusion upon her marriage. Speaking to Richard after their disastrous arrival, Ellen rails against the crowded atmosphere of the cabin and jealously accuses him of being in love with Ruth. At the height of her rage, Ellen finds herself caught within a close-up that stands in jarring contrast to both the preceding two-shots of the scene and the medium long-shots that characterized the previous sequence between Ellen and her family. Emphasizing the overwhelming quality of Ellen’s intensity of feeling, the close-up places Ellen within a tight and claustrophobic frame that

³⁹ In his article “*Leave Her to Heaven: The Double-Bind of the Post-War Woman*,” Michael Renov condemns the Berents’s “crippling family dynamic” in an unabashedly apologist psychoanalytic reading of Ellen’s character. Reducing Ellen to a straightforward case study of the double-bind victim, Renov continually makes unfounded assertions about her (possible) childhood traumas in order to substantiate his reading.

disrupts the suturing function of the shot pattern much as Ellen herself disrupts the domestic harmony of *Back-of-the-Moon*.

Whereas *Mildred Pierce* relied upon the mirror imagery of shot/reverse shot to depict the unsettling rapport between Mildred and Veda, Ellen is utterly alone and lacking a counterpart in counter-shot: In a cut to Richard's reaction, he remains in a medium-shot whose very distance highlights the camera's close proximity to Ellen. Marks has remarked that a haptic perspective enables the spectator to embrace rather than deconstruct the filmic object with his/her gaze, implying "a power of approaching [the film] with only the desire to caress it, not to lay it bare" (191). In her embodiment of Ellen, Tierney's striking countenance calls for such a haptic understanding. Attracting the camera (the close-up appears three times in the scene) and the audience even as the image itself seems to exceed the parameters of the frame, Tierney's face does not represent a static icon of ideality. The force of her magnetism resists any attempt to "lay bare" the star; instead, the spectator approaches the close-up with a gaze that explores – "caresses" – the chromatic textures of a body-landscape stunning in its aesthetic immediacy, if sinister in its diegetic significance. Beugnet has remarked upon the duality of haptic visibility, noting that "there is something both appealing and potentially threatening" (*Cinema* 68) in the extreme intimacy between filmic entity and spectator. Here, the contours and vibrancy of Tierney's visage capture the gaze of the audience in this

paradoxical union of appeal and threat, awakening the same uneasy intrigue that Richard spoke of (“I can’t say you look like anyone I’ve ever met before”). As the familiar beauty of the female ideal becomes strange but entirely attractive, Tierney lives on the screen as a star made uncanny.

The scene following this tirade, however, presents the serene loveliness of Ruth/Crain as the appeasing complement to Ellen/Tierney’s disruption. Just as Ellen’s tight close-up makes it clear that she does not belong in the world of *Back-of-the-Moon*, Ruth’s inclusion in the sweeping shots of the natural surroundings indicates that she has a place in this realm of conventional domesticity. This trope of nature distinctly recalls the melodramatic “space of innocence” described by Brooks, the Edenic “natural terrain” of the virtuous who must suffer the “violation and spoliation” wrought by villainy (29 – 30). Pictured in a long-shot that offers a release from the confinement of Ellen’s close-ups, Ruth works in the garden outside the cabin, the earth tones of her clothes and hair presenting her as an extension of the landscape. Whereas Ellen’s more glamorous costumes and demeanor mark her as incongruous to the rustic environment, Ruth merges with this setting and proves herself an inhabitant of the space of innocence it represents. Unlike Ellen, who can find no place for herself in *Back-of-the-Moon*, Ruth easily assumes the role of a wholesome young woman happy to comply with the traditional values that define the very land she

nurtures. And unlike Tierney, who draws the camera to her even as she defies its boundaries, Crain modestly resides within the expanse of a long-shot. To paraphrase Freud's definition of the woman desired by an anaclitic subject, Crain-as-Ruth literally tends both the tableau of the image and the garden it contains.⁴⁰

Yet just as Ellen/Tierney and Ruth/Crain's first appearances on-screen hinted at the fluidity between their identities and respective spatial dimensions within the film (the close-up and long-shot), a sequence subsequent to the scene of Ruth tending Back-of-the-Moon places Ellen within a similar natural setting. This time, however, the frame includes Danny, Richard's crippled brother (for whom Ruth demonstrates great, almost maternal affection). In this, the climax of the film, Ellen allows her brother-in-law to drown, watching him die in the lake where she has been teaching him to swim. In the scene discussed above, Ellen had admitted to Richard that "I love you so that I can't bear to share you with anybody"; and in this sequence, Ellen meets the sinister potential of that statement.

The scene opens innocently enough, with both Ellen and Danny framed in medium-shot as they sit in a boat on the lake. Lacking extradiegetic music, the shot pattern of the sequence itself establishes a rhythm and tone for this turning point in the film, as long-shots of Danny and Ellen making their way across the lake are

⁴⁰ Janey Place (60 – 63) has commented upon the distinction between the "nurturing woman" and the *femme fatale* as a familiar dichotomy in *film noir*, seen notably in Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* (1947) and Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950).

intercut with medium-shots of Ellen, watching Danny behind dark glasses as she rows behind his swimming figure. Like Ruth before her, Ellen is now part of the vista of *Back-of-the-Moon* – but only as the bearer of Brooks’ “violation and spoliation.” When Danny realizes that he has a cramp and calls for Ellen’s help, Ellen sits still in her medium-shot, staring at Danny as he goes under the water. After a shot of Danny sinking, there is a cut to a tight medium close-up of Ellen as she watches him die, her face an implacable mask that gives no sign that she hears the sounds of Danny’s splashing or frantic appeals for help that fill the soundtrack.



“Violation and spoliation.”

Once Danny has completely sunk in the water, there is a cut to a long-shot of Ellen in the boat, staring impassively at the now-peaceful lake. In a chilling variation on the shots of the heretofore serene space of *Back-of-the-Moon*, silence suffuses the scene as the green water rocks Ellen’s boat gently against a backdrop of pine trees. As the subsequent shot demonstrates, Ellen belongs not to that idyllic vista but to the alienated and alienating dimensions of her

close-up. Doane has noted that “the face is the most *readable* space of the body” (47); the fact that Ellen’s face offers only a blank page to the expectant viewer, then, enhances the unsettling quality of the shot. With Tierney’s striking features remaining expressionless and her eyes concealed by dark glasses, her visage is, like the lake that claimed Danny, a vacuum of a landscape – a deadening negation of feeling against the panorama of nature. But though exiled from the space of the film in a realm of her own, Ellen nonetheless has the ability to suture herself into its prevailing discourse, as she demonstrates at the end of the drowning sequence. After hearing Richard approaching, Ellen awakens from her contemplation and immediately begins to call and search for Danny in a long-shot spectacle of desperate concern, thus shifting from the current of her isolated narrative interlude to the diegesis to which Richard belongs. Having acted as the villainess, Ellen now moves to the opposite pole and plays the part of the innocent.

In her essay “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator,” Doane briefly discusses *Leave Her to Heaven* as an example of a film in which the agency of the female protagonist and her relationship to the gaze inspires the patriarchal narrative framework to engage in what Doane terms “extreme efforts of containment” (28) in the hopes of subduing this threat of womanhood. Yet while Doane rightly contends that Ellen’s danger lies, in part, in her assumption of the visual power traditionally

belonging to male subjectivity, she does not acknowledge that Ellen negotiates between the roles of spectator and spectacle. Ellen manipulates, that is, her object-ivity with a mutability that challenges the sexually dichotomous power structure of visual pleasure, and renders her an even greater threat than Doane acknowledges. If, as Doane states, “an essential attribute” of the structuring of classic Hollywood films “is the matching of male subjectivity with the agency of the look” (21), then the truly fatal quality of Ellen’s character lies not only in her usurpation of that visual agency, but also in her residence in the limbo between the positions of subject of the gaze and its object. Adding yet another dimension of ambiguity to the filmic world, Ellen cannot be defined as either spectator or spectacle.

Ellen [to Ruth]: What are you running away from? Is it me?

After Danny’s death, the film shifts its focus to Ellen’s family home in Bar Harbor, where Richard (ignorant of Ellen’s role in Danny’s drowning) inconsolably mourns his brother. At Ruth’s urging, Ellen decides to have a baby to help her husband through his grief, though she soon becomes jealous even of their unborn child and the affection that Richard will have for him. Upset also by the change in her appearance and not wanting Richard to see her “this way,” Ellen hides away in her bedroom in an attempt to preserve Richard’s image of her earlier self. In a conversation with Ruth, an unashamed Ellen stands before the mirror and reveals what she calls

“the wicked truth” of her feelings: “*Look* at me...I hate the little beast, I wish it would die...If you were having the baby, you’d love it. Well, I never wanted it.” Instead, Ellen wants Richard’s love for herself alone.

Karen Horney notes that pregnancy, the state of giving life to an entity intrinsically linked to oneself, has “an exquisite narcissistic value” for self-involved women (171); yet for Ellen, the unborn child only violates the ideal self in which she has invested her narcissistic energy.⁴¹ Ellen’s very determination to maintain that ideal self through seclusion, however, allows Ruth to assume the role of helpmate and even expectant mother, as she buys clothes for the baby and decorates the nursery. At this point in the film, Deutelbaum points out, Ruth even adopts the brighter colors in her costuming theretofore associated with Ellen – a shift that grants credence, he argues, to Ellen’s fears of being usurped by Ruth in Richard’s affections (166-168). Certainly Ellen is now completely aware of the bond between Richard and Ruth, remarking to the latter, “[Richard and I have] never really been friends, like you and he. He likes you.” Throughout her pregnancy, then, thoughts of the double-rival – either in the form of the unborn interloper or her cousin – haunt Ellen, transforming her single-minded fixation on Richard into a preoccupation with those who might take him from her. As Jean-

⁴¹ Lucy Fischer remarks that pregnancy also represents the “growth of a second self in the primary being,” in this way bringing the woman “closer to a lived sense of the double” (“Two-Faced” 39).

Michel Oughourlian states in a dialogue with Girard, “By the stage of psychosis, the object is no longer there at all; all that remains is...the obsessive concern with the model-obstacle” (in Girard 311). In making her eventual decision to induce a miscarriage, Ellen believes that she will defeat both of her enemies: the baby and, indeed, the woman who would have been united with Richard in her love for the child.

In her discussion of the maternal melodrama, Doane defines the genre as constructing a “scenario...of separation, of separation and return, or of threatened separation” (*Desire* 73). In her intention to murderously divide herself from her child, Ellen not only perverts this paradigm of love and loss described by Doane, but creates a grotesque counterpart to the maternal narcissism of *Mildred Pierce*. Unlike Mildred, whose tragedy of narcissism derives from a desire to preserve the ideality of her child at any cost, it is Ellen who must remain the *elle* of her own psyche; she who must find that ideal reflection continually returned to her in the guise of Richard’s love. The moments before Ellen throws herself down a flight of stairs in order lose her baby directly link the action to this consuming self-interest. As sinister and foreboding extra-diegetic music plays, Ellen sits alone before a mirror and despairs over her image, then suddenly realizes how to free herself of the unborn child. She clenches her fist in triumphant determination and looks joyfully at her reflection – the only entity capable of returning her gaze.

Though in this scene the camera does not reveal Ellen's reflection itself, several shots later Ellen's corporeal self has vanished and she appears only as a reflection framed within a full-length mirror. Dressed in a blue negligee and applying perfume and lipstick, Ellen's meticulous attention to her image disturbingly parallels that of an actress as she prepares for a performance. Much as Katharine Hepburn's reflection in the pool in *The Philadelphia Story* served to emphasize the actress's identity as "star," this shot addresses Tierney's place on the screen of the spectator's cinematic mirror of dreams – while at the same time alluding to the horror that Ellen herself evokes. In embodying this corrupting identity, Tierney assumes the representation of the now-uncanny continuum between extra- and intra-diegetic and the unraveling process of suture contained therein. No longer, to return to Morin, "plunged into" that reflection of idealized fantasy, Tierney brings the audience with her as she descends with Ellen into a *mise en abîme* of nightmares.⁴²

Whereas the scene depicting Danny's death deliberately juxtaposes the natural vista of Back-of-the-Moon with close-ups of Ellen, the sequence in which she murders her unborn child remains bound to the claustrophobic sphere of her subjectivity. The staircase of the family home marks the site of this act, recalling

⁴² In her autobiography, *Self Portrait*, Tierney herself addresses the intensity of audience response to the character of Ellen. She relates that after the release of the film, she visited friends who "asked in some embarrassment if I would speak to the cook. 'She has seen your new film,' the wife said, 'and when she heard you were coming she threatened to leave.' I went to the kitchen and said hello. We chatted and, after a few minutes, the cook smiled and said, 'Oh, ma'am. You sure were mean in that picture. Now that I've seen you, you are real nice.' " (140)

Thomas Elsaesser's contention that "the vertical axis of a staircase" often serves as a melodramatic backdrop against which the emotional extremes of the characters are presented (83); and certainly the camera's depiction of the staircase, in a swift pan that moves down and to the left, foreshadows the path of Ellen's literal and psychical downfall. The expansiveness of this shot contrasts the subsequent extreme close-up of Ellen, which lasts for about 12 seconds and allows the spectator ample time to dread Ellen's imminent act. Following this image are a series of fragmenting shots, these serving to reflect the act of severance that Ellen herself is about to commit: When she looks downwards, the camera cuts to an eye-line match of a close-up of her high-heeled shoes, as she places her foot underneath the carpeting to make it appear as though she had tripped. After a brief return to the close-up of Ellen's face, there is then a swift cut to a point-of-view shot of the stairs that stretch before her. In a final return to the close-up of Ellen, her eyes hold a distanced and stony expression as she offers only a slight smile before the camera cuts once again to her feet when she takes the step towards destruction.

Even as this sequence presents the utter rejection of the mother-child bond, it insists upon an intimacy between Ellen and the spectator. Marks has noted that hapticity allows the viewer to undergo "the direct experience of time *through* the body" (163); and with the almost excruciating anticipation of Ellen's actions building with the duration of the scene, the audience indeed experiences time

through the film's sensual meditation on Ellen's visage. In the mimesis implicit in haptic visuality, the spectator endures a corporeal, sensory echo of the troubled intentionality of Ellen's form as she lingers on the stairs. Such a proximity to Ellen's bodily presence serves to further heighten the impact of the point-of-view shots that punctuate the scene. Much as the audience engaged with Ellen's subjectivity as Danny died, here the point-of-view shots from her perspective construct an alignment of vision that once again sutures the spectator into Ellen's counter-narrative. With Ellen's myopic view assuming control, the world of the film becomes limited to the fateful staircase and the face of a woman ruthless in her intention to abolish her rivals – and, in so doing, preserve the sanctity of the self. It is especially appropriate, then, that a staircase provides the spatial context for this defining moment: As she stands at the top of the stairs, Ellen pauses on what could be considered the threshold of action; seen through her eyes, however, that threshold devolves into a precipice over which Ellen and the spectator are flung.

Though Ellen seems triumphant in the accomplishment of an act that so definitively proves the extent of her willful obsession (a few scenes later, she is shown swimming in the sea with exuberance), it is her role in the death of the unborn child that finally sunders any lingering rapport with Richard. Beleaguered and despairing, Richard confronts Ellen about the losses of Danny and the child's lives, and she admits to the murders in a fantastically misguided effort to prove

her love: “I couldn’t stand having anyone between us.” Richard, horrified, declares his intention to leave his wife.

Even as Ellen loses control over Richard, she also realizes that Ruth is a stronger foe than she had feared. Immediately before the scene in which Richard discovers the truth about his wife, Ellen learns that he has dedicated his new novel to Ruth. She confronts her cousin, accusing her of jealousy and plotting against the marriage. Ruth, now demonstrating her own formidability, only comments upon the Pyrrhic victory of Ellen’s machinations: “You’re the most pitiful creature I’ve ever known.” Throughout the encounter, the extremes of the isolating close-up and long-shot disappear, and what remains instead is a two-shot series of medium shots that emphasize the similarities between the women. With an over-the-shoulder design that places either Ellen or Ruth’s back in the shots that favor the other, the compositions – reminiscent of those in *Mildred Pierce* – create the impression that each woman is engaging with her reflection. With neither Tierney nor Crain highlighted as star or supporting player – the striking visage of the former shown only as a complement to the comeliness of the latter – the intra- and extra-diegetic roles of the two women prove interconnected rather than distinct. Tierney-as-Ellen and Crain-as-Ruth are, in fact, fully realized as doubles.

With this in mind, Ellen’s subsequent actions relate as much to her desire to destroy her double-rival as her will to dominate (or, as

Doane describes it, “have, appropriate, possess” (*Desire* 121)) Richard’s life. After writing a letter that frames Ruth for the death, Ellen kills herself. Certainly, on one level, Ellen’s act of suicide seems to belie a reading of her character as narcissistic; yet in destroying her corporeal self, Ellen ensures the eternity of her haunting memory – as powerful in death, perhaps, as she was in life – as a force that will devastate both Richard and Ruth. In this way, Ellen does her best to fulfill the promise made in her dying words to Richard: “I’ll never let you go.” Ruth stands trial for murder (occupying the very place, ironically, where Ellen should be) and while testifying, she admits her love for Richard. He, in turn, discloses his knowledge of Ellen’s crimes. Though this revelation vindicates Ruth, Richard himself goes to prison for acting as a reluctant accessory to Ellen’s deeds.

Upon his release, Richard returns to Back-of-the-Moon and Ruth. In the final scene, just before Richard and Ruth’s reunion, Richard’s lawyer remarks, “Ellen had lost. I guess it’s the only time she didn’t come out first.” Indeed, as Richard and Ruth embrace in the half-light of a final long-shot by the lake at Back-of-the-Moon, the lovers seem to have survived Ellen’s attempts at destruction. More precisely, Ruth herself has lived out Ellen’s worst fears by taking her place by Richard’s side. Several moments before this finale, however, there is a long-shot of the house and of a woman in white walking along the grounds; a woman whose languid gait and

elegant bearing call to mind not Crain-as-Ruth, but Tierney-as-Ellen. Though the following cut to a medium-shot of Ruth/Crain guides the spectator in identifying her as the enigmatic figure, the trace of Ellen/Tierney's presence lingers and once again violates the natural vista – this time with the shadow of the supernatural. Unsettling any sense of the women's discrete identities, Ellen/Tierney and Ruth/Crain are, in these last moments, twinned entities.

The conclusion of *Leave Her to Heaven*, then, offers a final rejection of polarity in terms of diegetic character, star presence, and even the dimensions of natural/supernatural. With this fusion of Ellen and Ruth, Gene Tierney and Jeanne Crain, the film depicts the eerie intertwining of the *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, capturing the uneasy continuum that links these dual modes through a Technicolor spectrum that heightens the spectator's sensory awareness. In so erasing the distinction between *femme fatale* and ingénue, star and co-star, the conclusion presents not the restoration of boundaries but the exceeding thereof. It declares, ultimately, that the differences between the women have vanished. Only the spectre of the double remains.

IV.

Conclusion: The after-life of the double

In distinguishing the crisis of mimetic desire from narcissism, Girard remarks,

Contrary to what is stated by the theory of narcissism, desire never aspires to something that resembles it; it

is always searching for something that it imagines to be the most irreducibly *other*...[T]he more desire seeks what is different, the more it stumbles upon the same. (338)

Yet contrary to Girard's appraisal, narcissism does not entail a mere desire for sameness. Indeed, what drives the narcissistic subject is the pursuit of what is perhaps "the most irreducibly *other*" register of existence: ideality. Determined to preserve the sanctity of the self, narcissists resist a potentially threatening reality by seeking alternatives to it – the adoring lover or brilliant child in whose form the narcissistic woman perceives the reflection of her best, most inviolable self. In their respective narrative trajectories, neither Mildred nor Ellen pursue entities that resemble them in their troubled realities; instead, they focus upon those figures who represent the promise of an "other," ideal experience. What they discover through their equally consuming preoccupation with the double, however, is the very fragility of that ideality. As *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven* make manifest, even a star may, to paraphrase Girard, stumble.

But it is the stars' very act of stumbling, of slipping from the pedestal of ideality, that so challenges Metz's notion of the "beautiful closed object" of cinema. As Morin reminds his reader in *The Stars*, the star negotiates a delicate balance between "sacred and profane, divine and real, aesthetic and magic" (84). In other words, in a revision-ing of Metz's assessment, the star does in fact bear "an inside and an outside" belying the seemingly unyielding "contours"

of her surface appeal. The star is not simply a shadow on the screen, mechanically acting out the fantasies of her audience, but a subject who attempts to preserve her identity in spite of the challenge of the double. If, as Girard declares, “Desire is always reflection on desire” (328), then *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven* grant embodiment to that reflection of conflicted mimetic striving through the embattled presences of Joan Crawford and Gene Tierney.

In revealing the precariousness of the construction of the ideal, and so rejecting any sense of impermeable parameters in extra- and intra-diegetic composition, both *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven* invite a spectatorship founded in a more fluid sensorial immersion. Marks writes that “haptic visuality implies a familiarity with the world that the viewer knows through more senses than vision alone” (187); and as the worlds of *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven* unfold on-screen, the suffusion of texture, shading, and color – from high-contrast black-and-white and opalescent shades of gray, to the lush intensity of Technicolor – evoke the audience’s near-tactile engagement with and appreciation of the imagery. According depth and dimension to the psychic drama of the mimetic crisis – or, as Beugnet describes it, “giv[ing] precedence to the corporeal, material dimension of the film” (32) – both works make the ineffable almost tangible.

Even as *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven* each stand as a double to the other, these aesthetically and thematically

intertwined films encounter yet another mimetic entity in the form of Douglas Sirk's 1959 melodrama *Imitation of Life*, starring Lana Turner and Sandra Dee. A remake of Stahl's 1934 original, Sirk unites the vibrant Technicolor palette of *Leave Her to Heaven* with an examination of mother-daughter conflict reminiscent of *Mildred Pierce*. Commenting upon the parallels between *Imitation of Life* and *Mildred Pierce*, Jean-Loup Bourget describes the search "for [the] respective lost daughters" (436) that characterizes both films, as the mothers seek the love of children who come to resent them as obstacles to a desired existence. As in *Mildred Pierce*, the use of two-shots between Turner and Dee emphasizes the actresses' resemblance to each other in a *choric* exchange of screen impact; and in close-up shots of Turner, like Tierney before her, the dimensions and shadings of her face and hair work as a Technicolor landscape as striking as any panoramic long-shot.

It is, however, in its treatment of Turner as star that *Imitation of Life* diverges from its predecessors. Where *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven* uncover the fragility of the star-identity without seeking to rehabilitate it, *Imitation of Life* frames Turner in a self-reflexive filmic world that preserves her stardom. Acting out her own mythology as a star, Turner plays a narcissistic actress sacrificing love and domestic happiness for fame and fortune; and rather than allowing her beauty to become a site of excess and disruption, as was Tierney's fate in *Leave Her to Heaven*, Sirk uses a

mirror motif that literally contains and reflects her image within a restrained framework. Turner's star presence in *Imitation of Life* may waver, but only for dramatic effect. She never stumbles.

Certainly one reading of the recuperative process seen in *Imitation of Life* could propose that, as in the relationship of doubles, this disciple of *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven* has managed to usurp its model-predecessors. Presenting its leading lady in a lavish, hermetically sealed cinematic dimension, the film has taken a figure and thematic discourse made vulnerable in the earlier films and reclaimed them as a collective beautiful closed object. In its patent glorification and exaltation of stardom, however, this very rehabilitation bespeaks an implicit desperation to reconstruct an entity so effectively compromised in Curtiz and Stahl's films. Moreover, the timing of *Imitation of Life* seems especially vexed: Only a year after the release of Sirk's film, one of Hollywood's greatest stars, Marilyn Monroe, would reject the sheen of more traditional studio productions in favor of John Huston's realist drama *The Misfits*. The stars were evolving in a post-studio-system Hollywood, and attempts to contain that momentum translated into a self-conscious hesitation on the threshold of a new epoch. As alluded to in Todd Haynes's nostalgic paean to Sirkian ethics and aesthetics in *Far from Heaven* (2002), *Imitation of Life* does not signal a renaissance, but the poignantly glamorous end of an era.

This, of course, does not mean that the structure of stardom entirely collapsed with the making of *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven*. Clearly classic Hollywood had many more stories to tell and numerous actresses to fashion into riveting screen personas before the elegiac *Imitation of Life*. What these films do represent, however, is the revelation of a duality latent within the seemingly monologic, self-contained realm of Hollywood stardom – the uncovering of an unsettling alternative to autonomous ideality. The perception of this fissure in the star’s pedestal, however, allows for the perception of a space of hapticity. Interacting with the image through the senses rather than controlling it with the gaze; negotiating the flux between approaching the filmic object and immersing oneself therein, the haptic perspective transforms the uncanny mimetic conflict within *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven* into a symbiotic vanishing of differences between spectator and film. As the doubles of their off-screen spectators, Morin remarks, the stars have fundamentally “taken our souls and our bodies, have adjusted them to their size and their passions” (*The Cinema* 148). Hapticity, then, inspires the spectator to regard the star – for all of her magnitude – not as an entity that is “irreducibly other,” but intrinsically akin.

Chapter IV

Transcending Narcissism: Materiality and Essence in Four Rita Hayworth Films

I.

At the end of *Down to Earth* (Alexander Hall, 1947), muse Terpsichore (played by Rita Hayworth) learns she must return to Mount Parnassus after falling in love with a Broadway composer. She pleads with Mr. Jordan (Ronald Culver), the angel who has orchestrated her journey to Earth, to allow her to cry and so assuage her grief; but Mr. Jordan gently refuses, declaring, “Tears are only for mortals. It’s an advantage they have over us.” In a film that plays upon the binaries of mortal/immortal and natural/supernatural, this statement offers a poignant caveat to the presumed triumph of the metaphysical over the physical: The ultimate emotive act of crying belongs solely to mortal entities – that catharsis is reserved for the bearers of a lived-body, not for a goddess who defies the exigencies of physical reality.

The fact that Rita Hayworth is the recipient of this rueful lecture enhances its impact. For the greater part of the 1940s, audiences identified Hayworth as the “Love Goddess,” a strikingly beautiful woman who danced brilliantly and attracted her leading men with an effortless sensuality. Lacking the strident self-sufficiency of figures like Katharine Hepburn or Bette Davis, Hayworth radiated a poise borne not of arrogance but an awareness of her own elegance; like the feline woman described by Freud in

“On Narcissism,” Hayworth seemed to hold herself at a remove within a more rarified sphere of Hollywood performers. Indeed, of all her contemporaries – dancers as gifted as Ginger Rogers and Betty Grable, glamour girls as stunning as Ava Gardner and Lana Turner – Hayworth stands as the star *least* likely to have access to those advantages afforded to mere mortals. Like Terpsichore, she is a figure whose corporeal eloquence has transcended the more visceral expressions of affect.

Yet as Morin asserts in *The Stars*, “Goddess-object, the star is of course something more than an actress who makes movies. But the star is *also* an actress who makes movies” (117). Obviously Hayworth was “real,” a mortal whose body was lived and not simply an object projected on the screen to signify the existence of a “Love Goddess” – just as the films in which she starred were productions created through various technical processes and not only the spectator’s desire to envisage a dream-screen. What the audience perceives as an almost magically immersive experience in watching films, then, finds its foundation in utterly earthly and concrete constructions. The significance of Hayworth, however, lies in the fact that her presence mirrors and matches the transcendent energy of the film itself as it unfolds. Dynamic and seductive, sensorially engaging and actively inhabiting the space of the screen, both Hayworth and the body of the film share a reciprocal relationship that

intensifies the phenomenological impact of classic Hollywood cinema.

Viewed in this way, Hayworth's performances at the height of her career offer embodied celebrations of the medium of film in general and Hollywood cinema in particular. Three films especially capture this process of reflexive homage through Hayworth's presence: *Cover Girl* (Charles Vidor, 1944), *Gilda* (Vidor, 1946), and the aforementioned *Down to Earth*. Paralleling the meta-myths of stardom constructed through Katharine Hepburn's starring roles in *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year*, these three films also explore the ramifications of the diegetic heroines' narcissistic investment (whether perceived or actual) in themselves as objects of desire: *Cover Girl*'s Rusty Parker must choose between love and fame; the eponymous *Gilda* plays the part of an amoral, self-involved *femme fatale* to hide a broken heart; and in *Down to Earth*, an indignant Terpsichore journeys to Earth in order to preserve her glory as myth and ideal. As she moves fluidly between the Technicolor singing and dancing of *Cover Girl* and *Down to Earth* and the somber chiaroscuro of *Gilda*, Hayworth exhibits a *photogénie* affecting and riveting regardless of the generic vehicle.⁴³ Orson Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948), however, presents a disturbing epilogue to this trio of films. A meditation on the futility of love and the bitterness of illusion, *Lady* deconstructs the filmic experience produced by the

⁴³ In 1959, Hayworth would even star in a Western with Gary Cooper: *They Came to Cordura*, directed by Robert Rossen.

studio system to which Hayworth belonged. With Hayworth as Elsa Bannister, an irredeemably corrupt and profoundly evil narcissist, the earlier films' more restrained examination of the female subject's role in the crafting of herself as ideal devolves into a condemnation of feminine artifice and in-authenticity.

Yet before analyzing the "lifespan" of Hayworth and the film's symbiotic existence, we must first attempt to define the lived-bodies of Hayworth and the film as such. Drawing upon Vivian Sobchack's phenomenological theorization of both the body of the movie and the human form, the following discussion will provide a broader conceptual and historical context in which to frame close readings of the star and her films.

Lived-bodies: Film and star

In *The Address of the Eye*, Sobchack calls for a recognition of film as a living entity unto itself, a subjective vitality expressing its perspective as a "*viewing-view*" as well as "*viewed-view*" (emphasis mine; 247, 202). Offering a kind of anatomy of the filmic form, Sobchack cites the various technical components that, like parts of the human body, function together in the cohesive totality that is the lived-body of the film: "Camera, projector, screen, film stock, chemicals" all provide the basic elements that underlie and enable the "*existentially transcendent function*" of the animated individual body (220) – that is, the essence of film that so captivates and engages its human counterpart in the audience. Sobchack goes even further,

likening the flow of images through the camera (as the material object enabling the vision of the film) and the projector (the object visually expressing the views captured by the camera) to the process of respiration; alternately receiving and re-presenting this circulatory rhythm of images is the screen itself, its “fleshly” contours containing the life force of the film (207 – 210).

Yet perhaps most crucial to the lived-body of the film is the quality of movement. Through its motility, the film presents its subjective perceptions of its surroundings in an ever-unfolding, continuously-evolving “visible, audible, kinetic...sensible experience” (9) – an experience shared by the spectator’s sensorial investment and awareness as s/he views the view of the film. In the mutual space of subjective-objectivity and objective-subjectivity, both lived-entities engage in a dialogue of perception and expression, in this way crafting an inter-subjective rapport (23). Laura U. Marks expounds upon this interchange between film and spectator in *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. In this work, Marks notes that works of haptic cinema insist upon a sensorial as well as psychological immersion in the film; accordingly, Marks distinguishes between film as an “illusion into which we enter” (18) and an embodied presence unto itself, with which the spectator shares a “bodily relationship” (3). Echoing Sobchack’s understanding of film as both a viewed object and viewing subject, Marks remarks

upon the “dynamic subjectivity” (3) between the on- and off-screen dimensions that emerges from such an exchange.

Decades before Sobchack and Marks’s illuminating phenomenological studies, Edgar Morin set forth the concept of projection-identification in *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man* (1956) and *The Stars* (1957). To offer a brief summary of the more detailed discussion in the introduction to this project, projection-identification is the process by which the animation and spirit projected by the spectator contribute to animation of the on-screen, spirited being. Morin refers to cinema itself as a symbiotic aesthetic experience: “a system that tends to integrate the spectator into the flow of the film. A system that tends to integrate the flow of the film into the psychic flow of the spectator” (*Cinema* 102). In his/her willingness to devote the flow of his/her psyche to the shadows and light on-screen, the Morinian spectator grants life to the film and the stars therein. This affective participation signifies, then, a desire to engage with and, in effect, produce the reflected reality of the film.

Even more prescient in its parallels to Sobchack’s theory of the sensorial dialogue between film and spectator is Morin’s following statement:

The kinesthesia of the spectacle is engulfed in the coenesthesia of the spectator, that is, in his subjectivity, and brings about projection-identification. Thus the absence of practical participation establishes an internal affective participation: veritable transfers take place between the soul of the spectator and the spectacle on the screen. (95)

Though focusing more on the subjectivity of the spectator than that of the film itself, Morin here nonetheless makes reference to the active life of the on-screen spectacle. In its irrepressible kinetic force, the film draws forth the audience's own energy and sensorial awareness. This "kinesthesia of the spectacle" also serves as what Sobchack calls the "*situation* of an existence," the existential context wherein objects both animate and inanimate reside and are presented to the spectator as part of an autonomous world (61 – 62). What, then, of the human figures who live in the greater corporeal context of the filmic body? More specifically, how is the star's body "lived" and experienced within that dimension?

For Morin, the star has always moved fluidly between the ethereal and the real. In *The Stars*, he writes that "the star is made from a substance compounded of life and dream" (85); earlier in the work, he declares that "the star is plunged into the mirror of dreams and brought back into view on the level of tangible reality" (82). It is this notion of "tangible reality" that inspires a further analysis of the star's corporeal negotiation of the spatial context offered by the film – the "situation" of her existence within the *film's* existence. In two of her essays – "Lived-Body vs. Gender: Reflections on Social Structure and Subjectivity" and "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality" – Iris M. Young elaborates upon the phenomenon of the female lived-body in all its limitations and unrealized potential within

space. In the first essay, Young discusses the “facticity” of the human form, or the state of being borne of the relationship between the body’s physical parameters and the space with which it engages (16). In his or her facticity, the human is an “actor” in the surrounding environment, someone whose actions alternately affect and are affected by the world in which s/he lives (16). Yet in “Throwing Like a Girl,” Young notes the “inhibited intentionality” endured by the female subject, the disconnection between that which she intends to accomplish and a prohibitive cultural context that relegates her to “a thing that exists as *looked at and acted upon*” (37 – 38). Internalizing this perception of herself as an object rather than an ever-evolving subjective entity, the female subject may adopt a narcissistic understanding of her body as a static construction to “shape...mold...and decorate” (44).

Certainly, in terms of classic Hollywood, the filmic body functions in part to highlight the aestheticism of the star’s body. Crafting a cinematic context to imbue the star with an aura of Mulveyan “to-be-looked-at-ness” (*Visual* 19), studio-era movies use techniques of lighting, framing, and costuming to underscore a sense of otherworldly physicality. The facticity of the star’s body is, simply, overlain with the idealizing presence of the filmic form. Often in that era, however, the “shaping, molding, and decorating” of the female body described by Young was not relegated to purely filmic processes. Plastic surgery was simply a matter of course for an

actress in any stage of her career – whether as a contract player attempting to break into the movies or a celebrity at the height of her success. Accounts of such cosmetic adjustments, now an established part of Hollywood lore, range from the matter-of-fact (Marilyn Monroe, for example, allegedly had her nose bobbed and a chin implant) to the near-apocryphal (Joan Crawford was rumored to have had her back molars removed in order to enhance her cheekbones). More than parables of vanity, these tales of corporeal shaping and molding demonstrate the vexed position of a woman bearing a lived-body that must appear dreamed in its perfection; the real woman's facticity is, then, subject to the ideality of the filmic world.

Rita Hayworth's own metamorphosis is among the most legendary, and indeed most dramatic, of such transformations. Born Margarita Carmen Cansino, Hayworth was discovered by a talent scout as a teenager while performing in a nightclub with her father, Spanish dancer Eduardo Cansino. First marketed as voluptuous Latina starlet "Rita Cansino," Hayworth's hair was dyed black and her fair skin covered with darker make-up; by the beginning of the 1940s, however, "Rita Hayworth" was born as a slender red-head with a hairline raised through two years of electrolysis treatments (McLean, 33, 48). In *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom*, a complex and exhaustive examination of Hayworth's significance in film history, Adrienne L. McLean analyzes the ideological implications of the construction of

Hayworth's persona. Tracing the "Americanization" of Hayworth, McLean points out that the very process of evolution that formed "Rita Hayworth" out of "Rita Cansino" (and, of course, Margarita Carmen Cansino) granted the actress a certain depth in her appeal: In drawing upon "Rita Cansino" as a "shadow image" of exotic sensuality, Hayworth's image as "all-American movie star" always hinted at a kind of mysterious back-story lacking in contemporaries like Betty Grable or Lana Turner – a back-story that renders Hayworth's portrayals of earnest showgirls and *femmes fatales* equally captivating and all the more intriguing (McLean 48, 51).⁴⁴

In this way, the depth of Hayworth's physicality parallels the multifaceted nature of her persona. As both a musical comedienne and a dramatic actress, Hayworth maneuvers the space of the frame with a charismatic intensity that further animates the existential form of the film. The facticity, then, of Hayworth's body within the filmic bodies of musicals *Cover Girl* and *Down to Earth* and *noir* classic *Gilda* bespeaks a star presence unique in its versatility and inherent ability to reflect the life force of the film, that Morinian "kinesthesia of the spectacle" – an alignment of energies unsettled by Welles's camera in *The Lady from Shanghai*. Transcending the varying degrees of narcissistic awareness presented in the diegeses of these

⁴⁴ In a related discussion, McLean provides an illuminating correlation between the ideological/historical questions that surround the studio-era labor of the female star and her independent identity as a performer. She writes of Hayworth's "kinesthetic subjectivity" as a dancer, remarking that the star consistently "expresses" both "her own felt subjectivity and how she is repressed by the material and ideological conditions under which her performing takes place" (123).

four films, Hayworth incarnates the vital energy of the cinematic body itself in her immediate and un-self-conscious photogenic impact – appearing not as a static object, but as a *living* ideal.

II.

Animating the pin-up in *Cover Girl*

In his *New York Times* review of *Cover Girl*, critic Bosley Crowther describes the film as a “gaudy obeisance to divine femininity”: “It rainbows the screen with dazzling décor. It has Gene Kelly and Rita Hayworth to sing and dance. And virtually every nook and corner is draped with beautiful girls” (in Ringgold 150). All mild cynicism aside, Crowther presents a fairly accurate summation of the film. Filmed in bright Technicolor with A-list stars Hayworth and Kelly, and staging many of its musical numbers (composed by Ira Gershwin and Jerome Kern) around a cast of glamorous chorus girls and fashion models, *Cover Girl* is very much a paean to Woman as icon of grace and beauty. It tells the story of Rusty Parker, a singer-dancer in boyfriend Danny McGuire’s (Kelly) nightclub until she poses for the cover of *Vanity* magazine and becomes a star over-night. After choosing fame and fortune on Broadway over Danny, Rusty finds her success meaningless and empty. She returns to Danny at the end of the film, leaving her smitten high-society fiancé at the altar. Interwoven throughout the narrative are flashbacks to a parallel conflict between love and fame

endured by Rusty's grandmother (also played by Hayworth), thus offering a context for two period musical numbers.

Though *Cover Girl* stands on its own as an emblematic "golden-age" musical motion picture, it nonetheless benefits from an understanding of the era in which it was made. In 1944, the Hollywood film industry was still very much invested in promoting patriotic fervor to support American troops in World War II. With this in mind, the war provides inspiration for much of the film's narrative and musical action: In order to try to forget Rusty, Danny leaves New York to entertain soldiers – only to see her face on a billboard selling war bonds; and a song called "Who's Complaining?" (performed by comedian Phil Silvers) wryly catalogues the trials of wartime rationing, ending with the refrain "...as long as they don't ration my passion for you." Similarly, a rousing musical number entitled "Make Way for Tomorrow" emphasizes the need for morale and a positive outlook at a bleak time of crisis.

The element of wartime culture most essential to the film, however, is clearly the "cover girl" herself. Jinx Falkenburg, a predecessor of what we today know as a "supermodel," plays herself in a small supporting role; and in the climactic "Cover Girl" music number, a parade of contemporary models pose before their respective magazine covers while a male chorus extols their beauty. Most importantly, the star of the film was herself a cover girl – or,

more precisely, a “pin-up girl,” thanks to a famous Life Magazine shot taken in 1941. Indeed, *Cover Girl* offers a more elegant play upon the phenomenon of the pin-up, that image constructed to remind servicemen of the “all-American” woman they were fighting to protect.

In his 1946 essay “The Entomology of the Pin-Up Girl,” André Bazin examines what he perceives as the dubious appeal of this mass-produced femininity. Comparing her to a “wartime product,” Bazin describes the pin-up girl as an expendable entity, a kind of “chewing gum for the imagination” that signals a decline in aesthetic, cinematic images of eroticism (158, 161).⁴⁵ Certainly the photographs of stars like Hayworth and Betty Grable (arguably more popular as a pin-up) render their subjects static objects of consumption for the multitudes; yet even as these images belie the dynamism of the women, they reference the memory thereof. That is, the success of the Hollywood pin-up girl lies not in her acquiescence to what Bazin terms “well-*fixed* norms” of beauty (emphasis mine; 158), but in the *active* sensuality to which the photographs allude. It is this sense of motility conveyed in the images below that made them such wildly popular pin-ups: Hayworth does not appear posed

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Bazin’s discussion of the “extremely artificial...[and] shallow” (161) pin-up girl provides an antecedent to the work of critics like Laura Mulvey and Mary Ann Doane, who decades later interpreted in psychoanalytic terms the shallowness of the female image. Bazin even anticipates the feminist theorists’ application of Freud’s concept of the fetish: He states that the “veils” that alternately conceal and reveal the pin-up girl’s body not only defer to a puritanical view of eroticism, but also offer “an additional form of sexual stimulus” (159) to the gaze.

but caught mid-action, and Grable smiles winningly as she walks away from the camera.⁴⁶



Rita Hayworth, 1941



Betty Grable, 1943

In this way, the interplay between stasis and dynamism captured by the pin-up finds its cinematic representation in *Cover Girl*, a filmic body borne of its time and its fascination with an epochal feminine ideal. In the truest sense of the concept of the “motion picture,” *Cover Girl* examines the sensorial continuum between stillness and animation, with Hayworth’s vibrant screen presence serving as the motivating force.

⁴⁶ In an endnote to *Being Rita Hayworth*, McLean briefly considers Hayworth in conjunction with Grable, referencing the significance of the women’s dual ethnic backgrounds (Hayworth as an Americanized Spanish siren; Grable as “the potential mother of a master white race”). She concludes the note by posing the question, “Could there have been a Betty Grable without a Rita Hayworth?” (219n56). In an effort to further develop this intriguing dialogue, subsequent discussions in this section will analyze Grable’s significance as Hayworth’s contemporary – though in terms of her presence as a star of musicals, rather than her ethnic/cultural implications.

Danny: Easy get, easy lose... You've got to get there on your feet, not your face.

Throughout the film, the juxtaposition between an “easy get” shortcut to fame and a more worthy, legitimate approach to stardom takes precedence in the narrative: Where Rusty is willing to model as a cover girl in order to gain the acclaim that has eluded her as a dancer, Danny insists upon the traditional paying of dues. More than simply a question of work ethic, however, this debate bespeaks a concern with the narcissistic undertones of Rusty’s desire for instant success – a concern, that is, that she will sacrifice a harmonious relationship with Danny for the chance to be a star. As the diegesis unfolds, Rusty’s investment in herself becomes more explicit: She appears on the cover of *Vanity* magazine (a clearly over-determined title); and upon her sensational debut she begins to shirk her responsibilities as a performer in Danny’s nightclub. In a brief moment, one of Rusty’s showgirl co-stars complains that there are photographers crowded in the dressing room “taking pictures of the mirror...where Rusty Parker first saw her face” – and though off-hand, this comment emphasizes what the audience is meant to understand as the almost absurd emptiness of Rusty’s fame, the vacuum of narcissism to which she surrendered in “getting there on her face.”

Yet as *Cover Girl*’s lived-body takes form in its kaleidoscopic Technicolor and energetic musical numbers, the more abstract narrative questions of narcissism merge with the material presence of

the film to create a hierarchical division between movement and stasis. When dancing exuberantly, Rusty embodies the verve and expansiveness of a genuine performer; yet the image of a posed Rusty on a one-dimensional magazine cover signifies her willingness to sacrifice that motility to fulfill self-involved desires. It is only through the medium of film – the *motion picture* – that these binaries find a space of resolution. The opening sequence, a musical number entitled “The Show Must Go On,” reconciles the disjuncture between “the feet” and “the face” as it demonstrates that Rusty (as diegetic character)/Hayworth (as star of the film) has command of both performative registers.

The film begins with stage curtains opening to reveal a young woman singing in medium close-up. As the camera remains stationary, she moves out of the frame to be replaced by a series of attractive chorus girls who each sing a line of the song and then make way for their co-star to claim the shot. Rusty/Hayworth is the final performer in the close-up sequence, the last of the chorus girls to sing and the first star to appear in the film. Though the spectator’s extra-diegetic knowledge of Hayworth signals an immediate recognition of her as the star figure, the stationary shot presents nonetheless a rather egalitarian approach to presenting the women: They are all, regardless of star status, “cover girls” within the frame of the close-up.

The long shots that follow, however, shift the focus from “the face” to “the feet” as the young women perform a dance routine in a chorus line. Following the tradition of the chorus line as designed by Busby Berkeley in canonical film musicals like *Dames* (1934) and *Gold Diggers of 1935*, such synchronized movements recall Siegfried Kracauer’s analysis of “the mass ornament” – the “indissoluble girl clusters” that mirror the cold rationality of capitalist production lines and the unfeeling formality of geometric patterns (76 – 78). No longer individual entities, the participants in these clusters are only “fractions of a figure” (76); as Kracauer declares, “In the mass ornament nature is deprived of its substance” (83). Dressed in identical costumes and performing the same choreography, the *Cover Girl* chorus girls at first appear to construct their own mass ornament. Yet as the scene continues, several of the women execute small missteps and slightly off-beat movements, some almost missing their cues. The mechanical precision, then, described by Kracauer and manifested in Berkeley’s famed production-line dancers is utterly lacking here.

Though several cuts to a dismayed Danny watching from the wings indicate that the choreographer himself desires such precision, what does exist on the screen is an expressive joy in motion. Each of the women carries on with her routine regardless of a mistake; they toss their hair and smile exuberantly at the audience (both diegetic and extra-diegetic) as their individual performances – missteps and

all – weave together to create an ensemble piece. Kracauer notes that whenever individuals (as opposed to the masses) unite, the “communal group” finds its production “endow[ed]...with a magic force” (76). Similarly, in this sequence, the magic force of the spectacle resides in the impact of separate entities negotiating the space of the stage and screen both in tandem and with an awareness of their own lived-bodies. As McLean writes, remarking upon the agency of “competen[t] and autonom[ous]” female dancers in musicals, “[O]ne cannot be made to dance *well* and with pleasure” (142).

As in the series of medium close-ups, Hayworth belongs to this chorus not as an exclusive “leading lady” but as a productive member of the ensemble. Inevitably, however, her unique charisma draws the eye to her – much as it does in *You’ll Never Get Rich* (Sidney Lanfield, 1941), a black-and-white film in which Hayworth’s work in a chorus line attracts co-star Fred Astaire’s attention. In the brief moments in which her dancing is highlighted in *Cover Girl*’s “The Show Must Go On,” Hayworth’s intense concentration and animation – complemented by her flowing red hair and broad smile – make clear that in terms of the narrative, it is inevitable that Hayworth’s character should become a star. Through the body of the film, as it shifts from medium close-ups to long shots, Hayworth demonstrates the force of *her* lived-body; and in this way, the scene reveals to the audience that though the one-dimensional stasis of easy

success and narcissism may tempt Rusty (her solo song lyric is, after all, "...since humanity discovered vanity"), the show will indeed go on with her active participation.

Inasmuch as *Cover Girl* represents a product of its time, it is important to note that a Betty Grable movie entitled *Pin Up Girl* (H. Bruce Humberstone) was released in April of 1944, only a month after Hayworth's film. In a kind of parallel-universe effect, Grable's film also capitalizes on her fame as a definitive pin-up: The opening credits appear over her iconic photograph, which is then displayed throughout the movie itself; as well, scenes in a USO canteen and a romance with a war hero further highlight Grable's all-American persona and her popularity with the servicemen. Though trading the sleek glamour of *Cover Girl* (which epitomizes the notion of a "prestige production") for a more wholesome Technicolor spectacle, *Pin Up Girl* is a charming film that shows Grable at her sincere, girl-next-door best. As Frederick Elkin wrote in a 1955 sociological study on audience response to contemporary movie stars, fans identified Hayworth with "a world of loveliness, luxury, and enchantment" and Grable with "buoyancy, cheerfulness, and happy endings" (104).

Interestingly, however, *Pin Up Girl* engages directly with the production of the mass ornament in a bizarre, over-long closing sequence depicting Grable as the leader of a troop of hundreds of women dressed as soldiers. In comparing Grable in the last scene of

Pin Up Girl and Hayworth in the first sequence of *Cover Girl*, then, the stars and their respective vehicles seem to share a point-counterpoint relationship: Where Grable's commandeering of the showcase indicates a concern with the display of the human form, Hayworth's presence expresses the lived experience of that form. To recall Kracauer's phrase, she unites nature and substance.

Rusty: I went to see a man...about a face.

This is not to say that *Cover Girl* entirely eschews a flirtation with style-over-substance. Certainly the climactic "Cover Girl" number realizes the full potential for gloss and lushness inherent within Technicolor. The sequence begins with a panoramic shot of a stage dominated by a giant camera descending to the ground, around which various women pose as a male chorus sings and pretends to take photographs. There is then a cut to a medium shot of the first model, who stands outside of the "lens" of the giant camera before looking to the left of the shot – after which we see her finally framed within the lens. In a slow tracking-forward, the movie camera progressively absorbs the stage-camera lens in a subtle slippage of apparatus. With the two mechanical eyes now merged, a tripling effect takes place for the parade of cover girls: Each enters the frame and stands to the left in a long-shot that captures her full figure; in the next moment, a close-up of the woman's face fills the right of the frame. The close-up is then replaced by her image on an actual magazine cover, towards which the "live" model gestures from the

left of the shot before exiting. Making full use of the Technicolor palette, the chromatic composition of the shot presents a rainbow effect comprised of the backdrop of the shot, the brightly colored costumes, and the women's faces themselves – all white teeth, shining hair, and radiant skin.

In her discussion of the musical number, Jeanine Basinger describes the cover girls as “more or less passive... They stand straight, wear good clothes, smile and wait to be admired” (*A Woman's View* 147). Although the direction of this parade of women undoubtedly plays upon their roles as posed figures of beauty, there nonetheless exists a deliberate acknowledgement of the power of cinema to bring these heretofore static women to life – to render them, in other words, motion pictures. As the eye of the filmic camera shares the gaze of the faux stage camera, the lived-body of the film itself grants verve and vitality to its subjects; and in so doing, there appears a free exchange between static style and motile substance. With this process of animation already in motion, as it were, Rusty/Hayworth's appearance in the number represents the epitome of the filmic metamorphosis: the transformation from a frozen icon of femininity driven by a narcissistic desire to be admired into an active, expressive lived-entity.

After the “shutter” closes on the final magazine cover, the screen goes black for a moment – only to be illuminated as the shutter opens again slowly to reveal Rusty/Hayworth, standing still

on the top of a high, winding ramp. Self-consciously playing the role of a cover girl, she strikes several poses luxuriously before making her stately way down, finally picking up speed and all but racing to the bottom of the ramp where a chorus of male admirers waits to dance with her. As Basinger notes, Rusty/Hayworth “is no stationary cover girl. She is a living, breathing talent...free and unleashed” (147). Rusty/Hayworth’s appearance itself enhances the kinetic energy of the sequence. Her dress is a shimmering gold, and her hair an even brighter red than in the rest of the movie; indeed, in this scene Rusty/Hayworth seems an incarnation of the red and gold tones that have so dominated the Technicolor skin of the film. Her engagement with the filmic body extends to the choreography of the dance routine: Racing down the ramp, Rusty/Hayworth progressively unwinds from the reserved stasis of her pose – that is, she *unreels* her body until she is as fluid as a strip of film itself, moving rapidly towards a space of expression and projection as the theatre stage becomes her screen. At times seeming fairly close to the camera, Rusty/Hayworth dives and swoops across the screen in movements that directly address the filmic audience, almost insisting that they share her sheer delight in motility. In so exuberantly claiming the shot as the situation of her existence, Rusty/Hayworth embodies that unique intersection between corporeality and ethereality, an ineffable essence that also defines the life of the film itself.

In its preoccupation with the female form as an object of beauty, *Cover Girl* presents a commentary on the making of the star herself. Where *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year* utilized Katharine Hepburn's challenging persona as a means to reveal the construction of stardom, here *Cover Girl* celebrates that construction in a montage depicting Rusty's make-over from chorus girl to glamour model. As her patron and magazine publisher looks on, Rusty is powdered and primped by various make-up artists; finally, once the "transformation" is complete (there is, in fact, no striking "before and after" effect), Rusty sits for her portrait and a single shot signals her imminent fame. Certainly this sequence is a reflexive one meant to reference the beautification processes undergone by any star – including Hayworth herself, as any remotely informed spectator of the era would have known. Basinger, however, comments upon the vexed message conveyed in this scene: The audience is meant to revel in Rusty's fairy-tale treatment, but must also accept that, as the narrative dictates, such moments of happiness are purely superficial and destabilizing to a traditional heterosexual romance. As Basinger states, "*Cover Girl* is a perfect example of how women were glamorized and made powerful as images...and then were asked to see this is a total mistake in regard to their personal lives" (149). The dream of stardom as realized in this sequence proves false and damaging, a narcissistic exploitation of

one's beauty that threatens the ostensibly more legitimate dream of marriage to Danny.

Fraught with double binds and bordering on the cliché, then, this make-over montage does not offer the film's most authentic scene of Rusty's metamorphosis into a star. Instead, that moment can be found in a subtler interlude depicting her first dance on a Broadway stage. The sequence opens with a panoramic shot of an empty theatre, with the rectangular dimensions of the stage recalling the contours of a film screen. When Rusty admits that she has never before danced on such an expansive stage, the producer attempting to woo her insists that she try it: "It's more like flying than dancing." While music gradually swells on the soundtrack, the promise of uninhibited motion offered by the stage seduces Rusty/Hayworth, whose steps become more assured and joyous until there is almost the illusion that she is indeed flying across the stage and the screen – exceeding even McLean's assertion that she consistently "add[s] an extra dimension to the flat surface of the screen" (161) in her performances. Indeed, in a silver dress that floats around her, Rusty/Hayworth appears as shimmering as the silver screen that contains her filmic existence; mirroring Sobchack's description of the screen as "constitut[ing]...the expression of a personal and finite temporal existence," here Rusty/Hayworth *herself* embodies the "fleshly boundaries" of the film's vitality as she claims the space of the frame and twirls ever closer to the camera (210). Where the

“Cover Girl” number that follows minutes later represents the self-aware zenith of stardom, this intimate and affecting solo dance presages the spectacle that is to come – that is, it shows the birth of an animated, living screen upon which Rusty/Hayworth’s fully realized star-presence will be projected.



An animated, living screen.

Ultimately, the narcissistic overtones of Rusty’s “shortcut” to fame find resolution not simply in her reunion with Danny at the conclusion of the film, but in her relationship to the body of the film itself. Engaging and merging with the life force of the film, Rusty/Hayworth becomes an organic element as essential to its existence as the screen or the camera. Though Rusty’s reconciliation with Danny offers a classic happy ending to the narrative, it is her alliance with the filmic body and its motility that ensures her freedom from the frozen fame offered by narcissism. It is, in fact, the true love affair of *Cover Girl*.

III.

Gilda’s Picture Show: Projections and transformations

If *Cover Girl* highlights the engaging, positive energy of Hayworth's presence, her starring role in *Gilda* brings forth a far more intense sensuality that remains latent in the Technicolor spectacle – drawing, in this way, upon the “shadow image” of exotic and erotic mystique perceived by McLean. Throughout her career, Hayworth highlighted this versatility within her persona by starring as both elegant romantic foils (as in her two musical comedies with Astaire, *You'll Never Get Rich* and *You Were Never Lovelier* (William A. Seiter, 1942)) and unsympathetic seductresses (as in Howard Hawks' *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939) and, to a more sinister degree, Rouben Mamoulian's 1941 film *Blood and Sand*). In the 1950s, after the peak of her career, Hayworth refined the Hollywood trope of the “misunderstood beauty”: In films like *Miss Sadie Thompson* (Curtis Bernhardt, 1953), *Fire Down Below* (Robert Parrish, 1957), and *Separate Tables* (Delbert Mann, 1958), she plays women whose irresistible physical appeal brands them as dangerous, regardless of their good intentions.

Contemporary audiences responded to this ambiguity, finding it alternately intriguing and unsettling. In Elkin's survey of American women, one respondent spoke of Hayworth as “very romantic and musically inclined...She's after gaiety; she's more concerned with the now than with the future” (104). Still another woman defined the star in other, less generous terms:

I think she's selfish in a way. I think she thinks about herself more than about other people...She'd

like a man that can give her anything she wants, the kind you find sitting in a night club, the kind just waiting for her to come in. She just wants to show off Rita Hayworth. (106)

In describing in such an extreme fashion the aura of narcissism that surrounds Hayworth, the respondent decries not only the actress's self-sufficiency and satisfaction in her own appeal (which clearly disrupts the idealized norms of romance between men and women) but also the sense of decadence that underlies her presence on-screen.⁴⁷ Where Hepburn's narcissism is presented as a sometimes-whimsical eccentricity allowed by her white-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant "breeding," and Joan Crawford and Gene Tierney work through their self-interest within a familiarly melodramatic Oedipal framework, Hayworth as the "Love Goddess" represents a slippage between lush appeal and excessive sensuality. She is a singular feminine force that has made the carnal an ideal.

No film better captures Hayworth's evocation of decadence than *Gilda*, a work which exemplifies the Morinian process of osmotic engagement between star and role – one of the most legendary of Hollywood mergers that would inspire Hayworth's wistful statement, "Men fell in love with 'Gilda,' but they woke up with me." *Gilda* traces the ill-fated romance between Johnny Farrell (Glenn Ford) and the eponymous heroine. Unhappily reunited after

⁴⁷ It should be noted that in 1955, the survey participants would have been aware of the scandalous undertones of Hayworth's "fairy-tale" marriage to the immensely wealthy Aly Khan in 1949 and their divorce in 1953; see Adrienne L. McLean's article "The Cinderella Princess and the Instrument of Evil: Two Postwar Hollywood Star Scandals" (in *Headline Hollywood: A Century of Film Scandal*, ed. McLean and David A. Cook. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2001).

Johnny's mentor, millionaire Ballin Mundsén (George MacReady), marries Gilda, the erstwhile lovers proceed to channel their incendiary attraction into jealous plotting and supposed affairs. The torment ends only when Johnny hears the words, "Gilda didn't do any of those things you've been losing sleep over!," an incantation that both frees Johnny from his perverse fixation and reveals Gilda herself to be an honest woman in spite of her presumed transgressions – a fact that the audience has been aware of throughout the film, after several scenes depicting Gilda in private moments far from Johnny's tormented gaze. Though the last sequence presents a reconciliation between the couple in an after-thought of a happy ending, the real affect of the narrative lies in its depiction of what one character calls "the most curious love-hate pattern I've ever had the privilege of witnessing."

Critics like Mary Ann Doane and Kaja Silverman have commented upon the narcissistic elements inherent within Johnny and Gilda's relationship, referring to the aggression and jealousy that often underlies the subject's frustrated relationship to his/her ideal in the Imaginary register (Doane, *Femmes* 108; Silverman, *Subject* 159). Equally intriguing, however, is the narcissism shading Gilda's means of "getting even" with Johnny for abandoning her years before. Desperate to conceal her broken heart, Gilda creates the character of "Gilda," a pleasure-seeking double concerned only with the gratification of her desires no matter the consequences ("If I'd

been a ranch, they would have named me the ‘bar-nothing’”). As this *femme fatale*, Gilda projects a narcissistic carnality that assumes a life force of its own. In *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man*, Morin describes film as “the product of a dialectic where the objective truth of the image and the subjective participation of the spectator confront and join each other” (*Cinema* 147); and indeed, this well describes the process at work within Johnny and Gilda’s relationship. In a troubling fusion crafted by Gilda herself, the objective truth of her potent physicality collides with Johnny’s warped subjectivity to transform the woman into her own double – a cinematic projection, a movie of herself. And though the last sequence proposes a happy ending for the troubled lovers, it is Gilda’s ultimate sublimation to the persona she created that signals the true conclusion of the film.

Johnny: You went to a picture show tonight. Alone.
Gilda: Really...Would you like to know whether I enjoyed it?

Throughout the film, the shifting relationship between Gilda/Hayworth’s lived-body and the filmic body itself serves to differentiate the two modes of Gilda’s identity; that is, the “real” Gilda and her alter ego. The first shot of Gilda, one of the most famous images of the film (and, arguably, classic cinema itself), establishes this affinity between the human form and the cinematic body. After leading an unsuspecting Johnny to the bedroom door, Ballin calls in, “Gilda, are you decent?” There follows a cut to an empty frame, transformed a moment later into a medium close-up of Gilda as she tosses her head up into the space and looks towards her

husband, answering wryly, “Me?” With its glowing backlighting and sheer suffusion of texture into the frame – Gilda/Hayworth’s hair as it falls back from the front of her face; her radiant smile first seen in profile, then turning towards the camera; the shadows of her shoulders and chest – the close-up presents its star as a shimmering, dynamic entity.



Hayworth, *Gilda*



Lana Turner, *Postman...*

In the same year that Hayworth-as-Gilda swept into the frame, another star made an equally iconic entrance: Lana Turner as Cora Smith in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Tay Garnett). Much as Betty Grable offers a contextualizing point of comparison to Hayworth’s musical roles, Turner stands as Hayworth’s counterpart in dramatic feature films. Yet unlike Hayworth, as *Postman*’s introductory shot reveals, Turner bore an aura of placidity that consistently skirted basic passivity. In a point-of-view shot following John Garfield’s gaze, the camera moves from the floor to a medium-shot of Turner’s legs as she pauses in a doorway. After a reverse shot to Garfield, there follows a medium long-shot of Turner as she stands motionless on the threshold. Dressed entirely in white with a turban

covering her hair, and anchored by her static pose, Turner appears here as a blank canvas – an impression further enhanced by the subsequent close-up that frames her still visage in its symmetrical perfection. Blandly self-absorbed, she goes on to study her face in her compact and reapply her lipstick.

It is curious, then, that of these two introductory shots *Gilda* should receive Doane's wary analysis. She points out that the function of the shot as a showcase for Gilda/Hayworth's beauty recalls Mulvey's description of the female star's "to-be-looked-at-ness." Continuing this argument, Doane describes the image as "correlated with [Gilda's] localization as spectacle; her movement into the frame...is...the 'moving' representation of stasis" (101).⁴⁸ But in comparing Turner's passive entrapment in *Postman* to Hayworth-as-Gilda's energetic impact, such questions of "localization" and "stasis" seem misplaced and even misleading. Rather than signaling an immersion into an objectifying vacuum, Hayworth's appearance in the shot defines her presence as utterly vivifying: She enters an empty space and, in so doing, grants it animation. As Doane herself remarks in the first paragraph of her article, "the movement upward to fill the frame with a content is displaced from the camera to Gilda" (99). In this way, the opening shot works not as an exercise in objectification but as a gesture of the

⁴⁸ McLean describes this turn of phrase as a "tortuous...attempt to reinsert Gilda in the patriarchal system that is classical Hollywood cinema" (159 – 160).

simpatico alliance between the body of the film and the body of its star.

In so establishing the life-giving force, or what Richard Dyer terms the charismatic “positive charge” (“Resistance” 119) of Gilda/Hayworth’s *photogénie*, this shot is the first in a series of images that belie the selfishness of the narcissistic *femme fatale* Gilda pretends to be. Indeed, in a sequence taking place only minutes later, the audience witnesses the deliberate construction of Gilda-as-double, the heroine’s intention to literally make a spectacle of herself for Johnny’s benefit. Seated at a table in Ballin’s casino, Gilda agrees to dance with an admirer over Johnny’s objections. Framed in medium long-shot, the shot fairly radiates a lustrous glamour: Both Gilda and Johnny are dressed in white, creating a pearly sheen underscored by the white tablecloth, grey banquette, and flickering candlelight. The subsequent shot, however, presents a remarkably different look. Johnny sits to the left foreground of a long-shot, watching Gilda and her partner dance sensuously in the shadowy background; yet in a flattening effect, they appear to inhabit an altogether different space – more precisely, Johnny gazes at what is revealed to be a rear-screen projection of the couple. With the filmic body crafting a spatial disjuncture between Ford in the foreground and Hayworth’s image projected on a screen in the background to give the illusion of depth, the divide between Johnny and Gilda is here not an abstraction but an actuality. Johnny is, in fact, watching a movie of Gilda.

Throughout the dance, Gilda continuously turns her body towards Johnny, leaving no doubt that she is hoping to inspire his jealousy. Indeed, after her partner comments upon Johnny's longing gaze in a subsequent exchange, Gilda clings to the man and appears enraptured (a pose belied by her theretofore charming but aloof attitude towards him). Johnny does not miss the embrace, and there is a return to the shot of him staring at the rear-screen. With the performative nature of Gilda's actions now made explicit, the significance of the rear-screen becomes all the more clear: Gilda is in the act of producing herself as a filmic body, a cinematic projection of *fatale* feminine potential; to paraphrase the excerpt of dialogue that introduced this discussion, Gilda *is* a picture show. Her production even bears a distinct aesthetic, as the process screen depicts an almost hazy blurring of dark tuxedos with only her evening dress serving as luminescence. Isolating herself from the gloss of the previous series of shots with Johnny and the authentic glow of the "positive charge" featured in the opening shot, Gilda now plays the part of seductress in a dusky, suspended dimension of her own design.

Ballin: You're a child, Gilda. A beautiful, greedy child.

With the dalliance pictured on the rear-screen serving as an establishing shot for the aura of narcissism that Gilda creates, she does indeed play the part of a "beautiful, greedy child" as she indiscreetly flirts with a series of men ostensibly for her own pleasure (she remarks of one suitor, "Isn't he pretty?...I like him"), but in

actuality only as a means of bolstering the illusion of amoral pleasure-seeking.⁴⁹ But in the quiescent moments standing in direct contrast to those produced for Johnny's anguished spectatorship, Gilda's true nature reveals itself – most markedly in her first version of "Put the Blame on Mame." Seated in the deserted casino with only a guitar for accompaniment and the men's room attendant for an audience, Gilda sings about Woman as responsible for the troubles of the world – with only a kiss or a rejection, she can wreak devastation. As Dyer points out, Gilda's relative solitude signals a "moment of truth" within the film, a "privileging" of her subjectivity (119); granting a further element of authenticity, moreover, is the fact that Hayworth's voice appears on the soundtrack. It would be the only time in her career that her voice was not dubbed by professional singers.

In *The Stars*, Morin cites dubbing as one of the ways in which the film can essentially deconstruct the figure of the performer. He continues, "Stand-ins, doubles, and dubbing bear witness to the actor's borderline utility: someone else, someone quite anonymous, can replace the actor or his voice without inconveniencing the spectator..." (124). In his assertion that elements of the star's lived-body may be fragmented without compromising the cohesion of the filmic body, Morin neglects to consider *why* the spectator's engagement with the film is not "inconvenienced" – he neglects, that

⁴⁹ In a promotional tag-line, film posters declared, "Gilda used men the way other women use make-up!" See McLean, 252.

is, the power of the individual star's *photogénie* to supersede any such interventions. McLean notes that throughout her musical roles, Hayworth's voice was dubbed by six different women (234n83); yet the consistent impact of Hayworth's on-screen presence as both an actress and dancer prevails over these vocal variables. With this in mind, then, the union between image and voice in this sequence grants the spectator an even greater proximity to Hayworth's strikingly potent materiality on the screen.

Lacking the kinesthesia of a musical number, Gilda/Hayworth's first rendition of "Mame" offers a confession-in-song. The scene begins with Gilda/Hayworth's voice humming on the soundtrack, as Johnny lies sleeping in his office at the casino. Waking up, he walks over to the window overlooking the gambling tables and sees Gilda sitting with her guitar. Though the framing of the shot (with the camera watching Johnny as he watches Gilda in the background) recalls the process screen projection of the earlier sequence, this presentation of Gilda offers not a tableau of seduction but rather an utterly un-self-conscious moment of reflection. Indeed, the look of the scene is fairly minimalist: Gilda's pale dress seems to blend in with the nondescript décor of the empty room, and the close-ups seem to invite a proximity to the aural space of Gilda/Hayworth's voice as much as the corporeal dimensions of her face – an alignment that recalls Roland Barthes's conceptualization of the "grain" of the voice as "the body of the voice as it sings...[inspiring the listener's]

relation with the body of the man or woman singing” (*Image* 188).

As Gilda/Hayworth sings with a rueful vibrato in her soprano tones, the camera captures her realization that she has become another Mame, her life now devolving into simply another verse in the song. Shifting Mulvey’s paradigm of the “silent image of woman... tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning” (15), here Gilda not only breaks a silence but literally gives voice to an awareness of her predicament. Mame may be blamed, but not without her knowledge.

Where this scene privileges an aural representation of Gilda’s existential situation, the greater part of the film uses contrasting tones of light and shadow to trace Gilda/Hayworth’s shifting relationship to the filmic body itself. In the sequence immediately following her first, rear-screen-performance of transgression, Gilda lies across her bed with her body bisected by light and darkness in the room. Caught between cold glow and inky shadow, Gilda is trapped as Ballin sits beside her and expresses his intense pleasure in the animosity between her and Johnny (“Hate is the only thing that has ever warmed me”). Later in the film, as Gilda gets dressed for a carnival party at the casino, the shifting between light and dark plays itself out on her very figure: With only the glow from a lamp in the background to halo her hair and the sleeves of her diaphanous dress, Gilda sits suffused in shadow in the foreground of a medium-shot. Unlike her contemporary Cora in *Postman*, who presents herself

entirely in either white or black, Gilda shares with the filmic body an existence within the spectrum between the two ever-conflicting poles of light and dark. Articulating the sense of enveloping darkness, she remarks, “I have the funniest feeling that this is *it*” – an awareness that her fluctuation between the dual registers *femme fatale* and fated victim cannot sustain itself.

Where *Cover Girl* depicts Hayworth’s rapport with cinema in a celebration of motility and expression, *Gilda*’s lived-body operates with an entirely different, far darker vitality. As the narrative unfolds in a series of unremittingly perverse exchanges between Gilda and Johnny, the chiaroscuro effect so elemental to *film noir* gradually begins to play itself out on Gilda’s form itself. As Janey Place has remarked, *noir* works utilize a specific iconography (extreme camera movement and angles, tricks of lighting) to mark the woman as a threat to the order of the male protagonist’s psyche (56); yet *Gilda* presents an uneasy symbiosis in which the dusky picture show produced by the heroine gradually elides with the greater filmic body. As Doane declares, “Gilda performs too well...she becomes inseparable from [her] act” (108) for both Johnny and the greater filmic body itself. This slow slippage as manifested in Gilda’s corporeal transformation signals the futility of her desperate attempts to convince Johnny of her innocence – it presages, then, the unhappy ending that awaits her.

Gilda: Now they all know what I am.

It is the tension between these two modes of Gilda's identity – fated victim and *femme fatale* – that renders her second performance of “Put the Blame on Mame” at the conclusion of the film such an incendiary spectacle. Singing and dancing (and even slyly hinting at the possibility of a striptease) for a crowd at the casino, Gilda plays the part of a seductive siren to perfection; the extra-diegetic audience, however, recognizes the desperation that this bravura charade conceals. It has, after all, witnessed the original, confessional rendition of the song that now seems to invite “the boys” to put the blame on Woman. In considering Gilda's subjectivity as it is revealed throughout the film, the impact of this performance lies in its depiction of a collision between her existential roles – its envisioning, that is, of the true Gilda giving herself over to the *fatale* double she has created. The “Gilda” of this sequence is, in fact, the most fully realized cinematic projection designed by the woman herself.

McLean notes that *Gilda* often finds recognition only by association with this scene (159), in this way lending the film iconicity through metonymy. Such a fragmented understanding of the movie unfortunately neglects the fact that this famous series of shots finds its foundation in earlier moments within the film. With constant references to defining images of Gilda already established as such – the introductory shot, the rear-screen projection sequence, and, of course, the first version of the song – the scene represents a kind of

mirror for the body of the film itself, crafting a cohesive reflection of Gilda starring in the picture show she produced for Johnny. As she says to him after the performance, “Now they all know what I am.” What “they all know,” however, is only the figure produced from a slippage between Gilda’s alter ego and the troubled filmic body.

The sequence opens much in the same way as the first rendition of “Mame,” with Johnny going to the window of his office to look out over the casino; as in that earlier scene, Gilda’s performance is first framed in a long-shot from a high-angle. The similarities end with the image itself, however: Striding in spotlight onto the nightclub floor, Gilda beams towards her audience in the foreground and begins to move to the rousing big-band music played by the musicians in the background. As the subsequent medium long-shots emphasize, Gilda sings and dances in a space of darkness illuminated only by her skin and the spotlight itself, a dimension of shadows recalling the scene of her first dalliance. Yet where the process screen presented a hazy vision of decadence, this series of shots captures Gilda’s sensuality in sharp precision: Each move of her hip and shoulder, highlighted by the sheen of her black satin dress and gloves, reveals Gilda as the embodiment of sexual promise and possibility. Moreover, the brassy tones of the singing voice used to dub Hayworth’s own intensify the performative sensibilities of the moment, filling the aural space with what the audience knows is simply a vocal masquerade. Ultimately, the sequence derives its

sensorial rush not from the energy and immediacy heretofore seen in Gilda, but rather in its creation of a tableau in which, to paraphrase the audience response cited at the beginning of this discussion, Gilda clearly just wants to show off “Gilda.”



“Put the Blame on Mame.”

Critics like Marjorie Rosen and Richard Dyer have remarked upon Gilda’s – and indeed Hayworth’s – joy in her body: Rosen describes Gilda’s attitude as, “This is my body. It’s lovely and gives *me* pleasure” (in McLean 159); while Dyer notes that one can “read her dancing in terms of eroticism for herself as well as the spectator” (121). These assessments are certainly correct in their perception of Gilda/Hayworth’s unique projection of satisfaction with her corporeal facticity. Unlike Turner in *Postman*, whose self-absorption manifests itself in over-determined signifiers like a compact mirror and tube of lipstick, Hayworth’s aura of narcissism bespeaks a genuine awareness of and pleasure in the aestheticism of her motility. Yet in considering the diegetic stakes of Gilda’s performance, beyond its

implications for Hayworth's star presence, the scene also captures the character's embracing of her narcissistic double – a *tour de force* depicting what Morin terms “the fantastic outline of the construction of man by man” (*The Cinema* 26).

The sense of fantasy comes to the fore in the two close-ups of Gilda. Though their composition explicitly recalls the introductory shot – with Gilda/Hayworth tossing her hair, moving into the frame by throwing her head back – the dynamism so evident in that image here channels itself into an almost supernatural *photogénie*. With the back-lighting framing the contours of her face, standing out in sharp relief against the black of the background and her costuming, Gilda/Hayworth seems to both evoke and inhabit what Martine Beugnet terms the “body-landscape” – a “suspended moment of undifferentiation” of sheer affect liberating her form from predetermined exigencies of gender or culture (30). If Rusty/Hayworth incarnated the vibrancy and vitality of Technicolor in *Cover Girl*, here Gilda/Hayworth embodies the very look of the *film noir* cinematic entity: light and shadow fitting together in a composition of extremes, the darkness ever-threatening to consume what luminescence is left to the frame. The shadows that once shifted across Gilda's form have now settled, claiming her not simply as a *femme fatale* but a kinesthetic, corporeal landscape of *noir* itself.

It is only after this version of “Put the Blame on Mame” that Johnny learns of Gilda's innocence, with the police detective (who

has served as a kind of Greek chorus throughout the film) telling him, “It was just an act, every bit of it. And I’ll give you credit – you were a great audience.” Johnny is, indeed, the consummate spectator in his relationship to Gilda: suspending his disbelief utterly, committing himself to the image of *fatale* femininity she constructs and projects even as the woman herself protests her devotion to him. In a strikingly incongruous conclusion, the anguish of Johnny and Gilda’s relationship fades into a “happy” ending in which the lovers realize that they were “both such stinkers.”

Doane attributes the clumsiness of the conclusion to the fact that “Gilda is not amenable to domestication, to being turned ‘inside out’ in order to expose an inner goodness. For the camera proves that she is all surface” (108). Undoubtedly the ending does not work, but not because Gilda is “all surface.” On the contrary, the texture of the film’s body in its entirety evidences the depth of Gilda/Hayworth’s energy and vitality, the “positive charge” of photogenic presence commented upon by Dyer. The surface of amorality and narcissism assumed by Gilda has as much substantiality as the rear-screen projection of her first indiscretion; and Gilda’s “inner goodness” – less a question of virtue than authentic life force – is not a suspected quality, but a fact of her nature demonstrated in those privileged moments of access to her subjectivity. Indeed, the tragedy of *Gilda* lies in the fact that its heroine is left no choice but to surrender, as the second rendition of “Put the Blame on Mame” makes clear, to the

surface image of herself that she herself constructed – a poignant osmosis not unlike that one experienced by Hayworth herself in relation to *Gilda*. In its eerie beauty, the scene marks the “this is *it*” moment Gilda so feared before the carnival: her complete sublimation to the life force of the picture show.

IV.

Appearance and essence in *Down to Earth*

In both film-historical and biographical terms, Hayworth’s immediate post-*Gilda* years represent a particularly vexed period. In 1943, during the making of *Cover Girl*, Hayworth married Orson Welles; yet by the time she made *Gilda* in 1946, the marriage was all but over. The couple reunited briefly that same year, however, for the making of Welles’s *The Lady from Shanghai* – a film that is now considered an essential part of the *noir* canon but, at the time, gained much of its notoriety from the fact that the iconoclastic director decided to have Hayworth’s trademark red mane cut and bleached to play the part of Elsa Bannister. Dismayed by the possibly negative effect of this *coup* on Hayworth’s career, Harry Cohn, studio chief of Columbia Pictures, shelved the film for 15 months (it would finally be released in 1948) and released a completely different movie: a musical comedy entitled *Down to Earth*, in which Hayworth stars as Terpsichore, the muse of song and dance. Filmed in rich Technicolor, the picture recounts the goddess’s journey to Earth in order to rework a Broadway musical called “Swinging the Muses”

that unflatteringly presents her as an “ordinary dame” instead of a regal ideal. Once on Earth, Terpsichore (pretending to be an actress named “Kitty Pendleton”) portrays herself in the play and attempts to impose her vision of the show with disastrous results; yet after falling in love with Danny Miller (Larry Parks), the composer of the musical, she abandons her narcissistic investment in the play and concedes to his version to ensure its success. The film ends with the promise that though Terpsichore must return to Mount Parnassus, the lovers will be spiritually reunited upon Danny’s death.

Marketed as a sequel to the immensely successful *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* (Alexander Hall, 1941), *Down to Earth* shares several of the same characters and a director with its predecessor. But more importantly, the film presents a meditation on Rita Hayworth as the ultimate star. Drawing upon visual and narrative tropes from her most popular motion pictures – especially *Cover Girl* and *Gilda* – the film deliberately constructs itself as the definitive “Rita Hayworth Movie.” As such, *Down to Earth* signals a turning point in Hayworth’s career: Released immediately after the making of *The Lady from Shanghai*, it represents the studio’s attempt to affirm her persona as the “Love Goddess” in the mind of the public and, significantly, preemptively rehabilitate her image in advance of the deconstructing force of Welles’s film. In so framing this defining moment in Hayworth’s professional life, *Down to Earth* serves as both prologue and epilogue by simultaneously reconstructing the

filmic bodies that bore her such success and foreshadowing an altogether different phase in the star's *photogénie*. *Down to Earth* and the Rita Hayworth existing therein are, then, lived-bodies in transition.

Danny: I need a goddess, and a goddess comes down out of nowhere.

In the final musical number of the film (and Danny's Broadway show), entitled "People Have More Fun," Terpsichore/Kitty Pendleton and several other dancers enter a deserted playground at night and proceed to play on oversized swings, slides, and merry-go-rounds in an exuberant moment of second-childhood.⁵⁰ Rousing and carnivalesque, the sequence is the most engaging musical number in the movie. At the beginning of the scene, however, there is a bird's-eye shot of the park, with autumn leaves drifting in the moonlight as the playground seems to await the animating presence of the revelers. A swell of strings on the soundtrack, brief and melancholy, enhances the poignancy of the image and its vaguely haunted sensibility – however fleetingly, it captures the aura of return, of near-uncanny re-visitation that pervades the entire movie.

Consistently making reference to earlier Hayworth pictures, *Down to Earth* itself marks a return to the star's filmic past: The love interest is a headstrong theatre talent who shares his willfulness and

⁵⁰ However reluctant or subliminal on the part of Columbia Studios, this setting directly anticipates the harrowing fun-house in *The Lady from Shanghai*.

first name with Danny McGuire from *Cover Girl*; the villain of the film, a gangster who finances Danny's show, is played by George Macready in a caricature of his role as Ballin in *Gilda*⁵¹; and there is even a paternal benefactor in the figure of Mr. Jordan, who recalls *Cover Girl*'s magazine publisher as much as he does his earlier incarnation in *Here Comes Mr. Jordan*. Finally, in a montage of newspaper clippings heralding the success of Kitty Pendleton, there is a glimpse of a gossip column about "Rusty Parker" taken directly from a similar sequence in *Cover Girl*.

In *Stars*, Dyer proposes that star vehicles stand as a genre in and of themselves, inasmuch as they present trends in "iconography...visual style...and structure" in the depiction of the leading actor or actress (62). Certainly *Down to Earth* seems to anticipate such a critical theory, taking as it does narrative and visual conventions directly from Hayworth's earlier work. For overarching and indeed overshadowing the imperious (and predictable) narcissism of Terpsichore herself is the self-reflexive nature of the filmic body, an entity entirely absorbed in its introspective, insulated perspective of production. In *Down to Earth*, the "Rita Hayworth Movie" works as a refined and utterly self-aware generic production. Yet most significant of all is its celebration of Hayworth herself as the definitive movie star, a Love Goddess perfectly cast as the goddess of song and dance. Where *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the*

⁵¹ McLean also notes that *Gilda* and *Down to Earth* share an "unconvincing tacked-on manner of...resolution" (140).

Year depicted meta-myths of stardom founded upon Katharine Hepburn's presence as a variable in the Hollywood dream factory, here Hayworth represents an absolute – a star whose unqualified ability and *photogénie* resolve what Morin describes as “the problem [of] the confrontation of myth and reality, appearance and essence” (48).

The film's establishing expression of Hayworth's star presence takes place in a scene in which Terpsichore-as-Kitty appears in a rehearsal for “Swinging the Muses.” Placing herself in the chorus line, she then steps out to perform the steps of the actress playing Terpsichore. Terpsichore/Kitty stuns Danny with her talent, and he casts her in the lead; he casts her, that is, as herself. For Danny and the other “Swinging the Muses” performers, it is a classic moment in which “a star is born” (with one of the cast members even exclaiming, “Where did you come from?! Where have you been hiding?!”). Yet as the extra-diegetic audience knows, Kitty *is* Terpsichore – just as it knows that Hayworth is Hollywood's own “goddess” of musicals. To phrase the scenario in Morinian terms, the myth of Terpsichore as goddess finds its complement in the reality of Rita Hayworth as star.

The sequence also reconciles the dual elements of appearance and essence in its presentation of Hayworth. Indeed, the vibrancy of her performance is matched by the vibrancy of the Technicolor itself. Shading her in hues of red, green, and gold, the chromatic

composition of Hayworth's image has an almost lacquered quality that literally highlights her famous features: Wearing an emerald-green dress to offset the bright red of her hair, and smiling widely as she dances, the actress has never looked more like "Rita Hayworth." Moreover, the familiar trope of Hayworth as a stellar performer in the midst of a chorus line is refined as she performs with enthusiastic abandon – twirling rapidly, sensuously moving her shoulders and arms, and tossing her hair, here Hayworth exhibits the ineffable joy in motility that defines the essence of her star presence. Like the filmic body of *Down to Earth* itself, which releases its own life force while continually making reference to its cinematic "ancestors," Hayworth's dancing in this scene bears an immediate vitality on the screen even as it draws upon the affect of her performances in earlier movies. Though her energy is a diegetic revelation to Danny, the audience simply recognizes it as an expression of Hayworth's inherent dynamism.

Where this sequence takes the various basic components of Hayworth's *oeuvre* as a musical performer and unites them in a quintessential whole, the scenes taking place on Mount Parnassus offer a somewhat different vision of the star. Framing the greater part of the film, which takes place on Earth, the Mount Parnassus sequences provide the context for both the introduction and conclusion of Terpsichore/Hayworth's role. Throughout these scenes, Terpsichore/Hayworth wears a diaphanous blue gown, with

her hair pulled away from her face in an upsweep. In contrast to those sequences on Earth, in which Hayworth looks like a definitive version of her 1940s self, the Mount Parnassus images call attention to other aspects of Hayworth's appearance and essence: With her hair done up instead of flowing down into her face, Hayworth's neck and defined jaw-line become prominent features; as well, her frame – though always elegant – here appears positively statuesque.



On Mount Parnassus.

Altogether, the regal bearing with which Hayworth plays Terpsichore introduces an air of maturity theretofore unseen in her earlier films. Certainly, even at the beginning of her career, Hayworth's consummate glamour and poise often contributed to a quality of aloofness seemingly at odds with the immediate, affective rapport she shared with the body of the film; yet the series of shots on Mount Parnassus gesture towards a moment of photogenic transition in which Hayworth's animation moves towards a dignified serenity. Indeed, the painterly sensibilities of the filmic body match this new, statelier presence borne by Hayworth. Though remarkably glossy throughout the film, the Technicolor palette in the Mount Parnassus

sequences creates a rich *tableau* of otherworldliness: The white of the foggy “clouds” offsets the light, crisp blue of the sky; and the hues of Hayworth’s gowned figure blend into shades of gold, pink, and violet. As Terpsichore, Hayworth presents as fantastic and striking an image as the giant Grecian columns that rise into the backdrop of the sky – while at the same time imbuing the placid majesty of the milieu with the undercurrent of her motility, however comparatively restrained. With the stasis of *Cover Girl*’s still photography now shifting into the staidness of classical portraiture, the scenes on Mount Parnassus nonetheless offer a resistance to inertia through the potential energy always already inherent in Hayworth’s very presence. Offering, as ever, an alternative to the notion of the female star as an aesthetic abstraction frozen in a rarified existence, here Hayworth-as-Terpsichore radiates the magic of a myth come to *life*.

Unlike *The Lady from Shanghai*, which would depict Hayworth’s equanimity and otherworldly air as sinister inscrutability, *Down to Earth* presents this composure as part of the “divine right” of Terpsichore *and* Hayworth as goddesses of their respective realms. Cementing its existential situation as an entity in transition, the movie itself both reflects Hayworth’s past and looks towards her future – for a few years later, in her series of films in the 1950s (most notably *Fire Down Below* and *Separate Tables*), Hayworth would more fully incorporate this regality into her star presence as she portrayed vital, sensual women who nonetheless keep themselves at a remove. In so

adding another dimension to her appearance and essence, Hayworth in *Down to Earth* demonstrates once again the versatility of her lived-body and the fluidity of her *photogénie*.

Danny: I sometimes wonder if she ever was real.

Preoccupied as it is with boldly declaring Hayworth as the epitome of stardom, *Down to Earth* nonetheless also utilizes subtler visual and narrative cues to emphasize the uniqueness of its leading lady. Though the film often presents Hayworth in musical numbers and close-ups that frame her in solitary glory for the audience's admiration, it also places her in direct opposition to the other actresses (or, considering that Hayworth is the only female lead, "bit players"). Movies like *Cover Girl* and *Tonight and Every Night* (Victor Saville, 1945) make use of this compare/contrast iconography, casting a blonde foil/friend to highlight Hayworth's originality as a star presence – with one character in *Cover Girl* referring to Maureen (Leslie Brooks), Hayworth's fairer co-star, as "unusual [looking]...for a blonde." Once again carrying on in this generic tradition of the Hayworth vehicle, the actress whom Terpsichore/Kitty replaces in the starring role is a brassy woman with bleached-blond hair (played by Adele Jergens); but at the beginning of the last third of the film, a startling occurrence alters its visual composition: Hayworth shares the frame with six other redheads.

After Terpsichore-as-Kitty convinces Danny to rewrite "Swinging the Muses" according to her dictates, thus creating a

ponderous paean to the majesty of the muses, the cast gather to read the bad reviews. Furious at Kitty for causing this failure, the other performers confront her. In a succession of medium-shots, Kitty/Hayworth gradually finds herself surrounded by five women and one man, each with their backs to the camera and each with varying shades of red in their hair. At times in the scene, especially when Kitty/Hayworth speaks to one auburn-haired actress to the left of the frame, it appears as though she is engaging with her own doubles. Later, the penultimate sequence of the film enhances this doubling effect by reenacting part of Terpsichore/Kitty's "star is born" moment with a (red-headed) actress from the chorus line: She flings herself into her agent's arms and exclaims, just as the muse did before her, "Just think – they took me out of the chorus and gave me the lead! I'm going to play Terpsichore!"

Mirroring the film's diegetic preoccupation with stardom, these iconographic elements recall Morin's description of the phenomenon of star-making: "At the outset, anyone endowed with...beauty can aspire to become a star. *Every pretty girl* can say, 'Why not me?' " (emphasis mine; 40). Both the actress who eventually lands Terpsichore/Kitty's part (after the muse has returned to Mount Parnassus) and those young women who angrily confront her ostensibly represent in the visual and narrative course of the film the successors to the goddesses Terpsichore and Hayworth. Not the typical blondes who complement Hayworth's titian radiance, these

starlets appear to be on the threshold of diluting the star's singular impact on the screen – they are in the process, that is, of assuming her role. In an essay on “Body, Voice” in the cinema, Stephen Heath notes that “the body in films is also moments, intensities, outside a simple constant unity of the body as a whole...[F]ilms are full of fragments, bits of bodies, gestures, desirable traces, fetish points” (183). Writing of the “stressed attraction of a star in this or that part of the body,” Heath relates these corporeal signatures to fetishes that exceed their essential physical provenance as being “the property of some *one*” (183). According to this reading, then, Hayworth's red mane would represent a “desirable trace” whose abstract function as a fetish renders it isolated from the star's lived-body; and in this way, to return to Morin's discussion of the stand-in, Hayworth's “borderline utility” would be proven by any starlet who could adopt that same “attraction.”

Yet the depiction of the young women who surround Terpsichore/Hayworth in *Down to Earth* belies this reading of on-screen affect. In its reflexive investment in Hayworth's star presence, the film goes on to demonstrate that such usurpation is, in fact, impossible: After Kitty briefly leaves the show in protest over the bad reviews and the cast's criticism, Danny auditions the remaining chorus girls. Listening to one young woman read the lines, he sighs, “I'm sorry, honey. It's just too much for you.” And in the penultimate scene with the agent, the young woman's success story is

not her own; it is, rather, a replay of Kitty Pendleton's. They are, like the everyman "pretty girl" of the star-making paradigm, endowed with beauty, but they lack, to adopt Morin's terms, "grace": "What matters is the *gift* – that is, the gift of oneself as much as that miraculous and transcendent gift...of grace" (41). In the giving of her *photogénie* – shown to be inimitable and irreplaceable – Hayworth truly "graces" the screen in *Down to Earth*.

Whereas Hayworth's roles in *Cover Girl* and *Gilda* invite comparisons to contemporaries like Betty Grable and Lana Turner, *Down to Earth* sets forth an insulated existence in which Hayworth herself stands as the only point of reference. The self-reflection of this filmic body is hardly one-dimensional, however: In a bittersweet variation on the chilling hall of mirrors in *The Lady from Shanghai*, *Down to Earth* unfolds as a two-way mirror both reflecting and anticipating Hayworth's image. Re-visioning the vivacity of the star's past performances and offering a glimpse of her future evolution into a more subdued regality, and celebrating her persona whilst rehabilitating it in anticipation of Welles's movie, the film seems suspended in time-space – much like Terpsichore herself, in the final scene. Attempting to ease Terpsichore's mourning for Danny, Mr. Jordan shows her their eventual reunion: Standing in the clouds with the archangel, the Terpsichore of the present watches as her future self takes Danny's hand and joins him on his journey to heaven. Like the gift of grace described by Morin, the moment both

evokes the “miraculous and transcendent” and gives it material expression in its subsequent image, the last of the film that so sought to unite myth and reality: Rita Hayworth dancing.

V.

Fakery and *The Lady from Shanghai*

After seeing Rita Hayworth in the spectacular, self-referential fantasy of *Down to Earth*, audiences next glimpsed the star in an altogether different milieu. In its stark expressionism and cynicism, Welles’s *The Lady from Shanghai* presents a departure not only from the light-hearted musicals in which Hayworth starred but also the fluid *noir* landscape of *Gilda*. It follows Michael O’Hara (Welles) as, after an ill-fated meeting with the beautiful *femme fatale* Elsa Bannister, he becomes entangled in a vertiginous cycle of murderous plots that cast him as Elsa’s fall-guy – but at the end of the film, he emerges relatively unscathed while his former love lies dying alone. Not a romance so much as a condemnation of the illusions that masquerade as love; not a mystery so much as a recounting of one man’s fleeting journey through a labyrinth of lies, *The Lady from Shanghai* envisages a world in which style is a seductive mockery of substance and the crafting of artifice is an art unto itself. It is a film about fakes.

Years later, in 1974, Welles would make *F for Fake*, a film that more explicitly examines the artist’s maneuvering of the line between truth and illusion, fakery and magic. Treating this delicate

balance as an inescapable given, Welles uses famous art forger Elmyr de Hory, author Clifford Irving (who wrote an entire book about Howard Hughes based on lies), and finally himself as case studies of “charlatans.” Even as he eulogizes irreproachable works of art like the cathedral at Chartres and geniuses like Picasso, Welles refuses to indict the forgers. Instead, he evokes a sense of inescapable destiny in the artist’s dilemma in creation, quoting from Rudyard Kipling’s “The Conundrum of the Workshops”:

The tale is as old as the Eden tree – and new as the
new-cut tooth –
For each man knows ere his lip-thatch grows he is
master of Art and Truth;
And each man hears as the twilight nears, to the beat
of his dying heart,
The Devil drum on the darkened pane: “You did it, but
was it Art?”(272)

Interestingly, however, in reciting this part of the poem, Welles quotes the refrain as, “It’s *pretty*, but was it Art?” – a line from an earlier stanza that he follows with his own question: “It’s pretty, but is it *rare*?” In considering Welles’s depiction of Rita Hayworth in *The Lady from Shanghai*, one could image that he might have had the same musing about her and her peers in the Hollywood industry of stardom.⁵²

⁵² Because *The Lady from Shanghai* is a movie inextricably associated both historically and aesthetically with Welles’s iconoclastic vision as a filmmaker, this chapter will directly engage with the stakes of his unique perspective. Certainly the other filmic analyses in the thesis do not focus as directly on a given filmmaker; yet Welles’s presence – as both director and star – so dominates *Lady*’s production that it is arguably critically constructive to consider Hayworth’s work in the film in relation to his own.

At this juncture in the discussion, one must acknowledge that Welles’s criticism of the star system (and, specifically, its often-reductive treatment of

As an artist who once “went to Hollywood [instead of prison]” for his *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast hoax, as he remarks in *F for Fake*, a younger Welles seems to have crafted *The Lady from Shanghai* as the original study in his analysis of illusion and trickery. While benevolently world-weary in his later movie, the *The Lady from Shanghai*-era Welles embarks on a far less ironic quest to prove himself the master of Art and Truth in studio-era Hollywood; and in so deconstructing Hayworth’s image as a quintessential “movie star,” he abolishes any sense of her own artistry as a performer. As McLean notes, Welles’ desire to prove the “spurious basis” of the star-phenomenon leads to a film that “subvert[s], taint[s],...demolish[es] Hayworth’s kinesthetic subjectivity” (154, 26). Casting Hayworth as the most amoral of *femmes fatales*, Welles creates a narcissistic villainess who has, to Michael’s disappointment, never “found something better to follow” than her own nature.

women in the *noir* genre) does not necessarily bespeak a personal condemnation of Hayworth’s place within that system. Indeed, as directed by Welles, she imbues the role of Elsa, an icon of feminine deceit, with a kind of steely reserve that contributes mightily to the overall success of his project. What the chapter will explore, however, are the consequences of this project for Hayworth’s embodied affinity with the filmic form: for as the film unreels, it deconstructs not simply the actress’s studio-produced persona, but her intrinsic, immediate cinematic affect.

As a final note, one could also view the film as Welles’s commentary on another system: not of stardom, but of the class-conscious society that produces amoral figures like Elsa and her husband; they are, to recall Michael’s fable in the beach scene, “sharks” that will destroy themselves in their hunger for power. With this in mind, then, Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* (1944) would provide an intriguing comparison – both films sharing the intersection between the desire for wealth, sensual pleasures, feminine fakery (highlighted, for example, by Barbara Stanwyck’s blonde wig), and a camera that tends towards a fetishistic gaze at the woman.

Lucy Fischer (somewhat hyperbolically) writes that “there is almost no female character in the history of cinema” as narcissistic as Elsa, and comments upon the “process of covering over” that takes place in the film as the archetype of woman-as-narcissist disguises herself as a “hysteric” woman-in-need (*Shot 48*). Complementing this diegetic hoax carried out by Elsa, however, is the extra-diegetic one designed by Welles. In his determination to “reveal” the machinations of feminine fakery and studio-produced ideality, Welles overlays Hayworth’s authentic *photogénie* with an oppressive negativity that renders the bodies of both the actress and the film as sterile as Elsa’s narcissism itself. They are not lived-bodies, but ghosts.

Elsa: I’m not what you think I am.

Where *The Lady from Shanghai*’s noir contemporaries like Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* (1944) and Jacques Tourneur’s *Out of the Past* (1947) (and, of course, *Gilda* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*) frame the first image of their respective *femmes fatales* with a gaze that wavers between romanticizing and fetishizing its object, Welles’s presentation of Elsa/Hayworth offers no such troublingly seductive impact. As Michael O’Hara’s voice-over begins, the camera tilts up from a shot of the pavement to a long-shot of a woman in white riding in a carriage; it then pans progressively closer to finally frame Elsa/Hayworth in a medium shot. Completely removed from her surroundings, she never looks towards the camera

– instead, she gives a cursory glance towards her own reflection in the window of the carriage. Heretofore a figure whose image on-screen bespoke a unity between the human and cinematic entity, Hayworth now becomes a vacuum of presence: With her white hair, skin, and dress, she is, as Peter Conrad comments, “a photographic negative of herself” (232).

Indeed, any radiance emanating from the image derives itself from a purely chromatic juxtaposition between the shadows of the carriage and the platinum glow of Elsa/Hayworth’s body; and the carriage window, reflecting only Elsa’s vague reflection, is a parody of depth in its function as a symbol of the anti-heroine’s empty narcissism. Though the second rendition of “Put the Blame on Mame” in *Gilda* offers a similarly extreme rendering of light and dark, the kinesthesia of Hayworth’s performance redeemed it from the one-dimensionality of this shot. A subsequent series of medium close-ups emphasizes and calls forth an extreme version of the regal stillness first seen in *Down to Earth*, as Elsa/Hayworth receives Michael’s attention with an aloof graciousness, barely moving her head or parting her lips in a smile. As placid as the introductory shot of Cora Smith/Lana Turner in *Postman*, this image of Hayworth-as-Elsa evokes a sense of unhappy destiny in an audience aware of the vitality that had once emanated from Hayworth. As Andrew Britton remarks, the “radical reconception” of the actress’s beauty serves to “conceal the essential nature of the woman” who bears it (220). In

this scene, the concealment of the actress's identity as a star presence is a deception far more ominous than the diegetic plots hinted at in Michael's voice-over.

Yet what McLean describes as Michael's "self-deprecating narration" (151) proclaims that he was not in his "right mind" after one glimpse of Elsa; over one of the medium close-ups of Elsa, Michael's voice remarks, "Some people can smell danger...Not me." "Some people," that is, can recognize the false from the genuine, and perceive the distinction between illusion and actuality. What Michael means to convey in his rueful confessional, then, is that Elsa was simply too good of a fake for him to tell the difference – a rationalization that seems ironic in considering that Welles's camera insists with great intensity on aligning Rita Hayworth with blatantly manufactured illusions from the dream factory of Hollywood.

A brief montage of Elsa/Hayworth diving evidences this project. Framed in the circular lens of the telescope used by Arthur Grisby (Glenn Anders), later revealed to be Elsa's co-conspirator in the plot to kill her husband, Elsa/Hayworth dives off cliffs and lies in the sun in a series of pin-up girl poses intercut with shots of Grisby's grotesque, leering face. As she smiles vaguely to an absent audience, luxuriating in a tritely exhibitionist moment of Mulveyan to-be-looked-at-ness, Elsa/Hayworth calls to mind the hierarchy between the pin-up and the star theorized by Morin: Drawing upon Margaret Thorp's comment that "*a star's importance is in inverse proportion*

to the amount of leg shown in her photographs,” Morin states that “[the star] climbs the ladder to stardom by pinup poses, sunbaths, and swimming pools. She has reached the top when she is photographed in hostess gowns” (43). With this in mind, the diving montage deconstructs both the originality of Hayworth’s photogenic affect and her status as a star itself, reducing her to the anonymity of the “pretty girls” seen in *Down to Earth*. As Morin asserts, “The pinup is indeterminate. The star is superdetermined” (44) – and in contrast to the spectrum of motion exhibited in the pin-ups and chorus line of *Cover Girl*, in which Hayworth inhabited the space of the frame as a star with unique energy, these shots cast Hayworth as an indistinctive place-filler within their composition. In a variation on Kracauer’s concept of the mass ornament, so overturned by the dancers in *Cover Girl*, Welles casts Hayworth as an ornament *for* the masses; certainly pretty but hardly rare, she is, in fact, a fake Rita Hayworth.

Sobchack describes the camera as a tool representing “an *amplification* of perceptual experience,” noting that it functions as an extension of corporeal capacity allowing the director to transcend the limitations of his/her unaided, human sight and gain a greater proximity to its object. Ultimately, the camera “offers ‘more’ as well as ‘less’ in relation to direct lived-body engagement with phenomena” (183). Rather than utilize this aspect of the camera’s function as a mechanical appendage, however, Welles chooses to *mediate* the interactive relationship between Hayworth and the

camera. Marking her emphatically as a product of the lecher's telescope and not his own directorial apparatus, Welles distances the filmic body from Hayworth's own as if in an attempt to shield it from the vulgarity of studio-manufactured commercial appeal. For Hayworth, a star whose on-screen impact lies in her symbiotic rapport with the materiality of the film, this intervention renders her a shadow of herself. By contrast, a sequence early in *F for Fake* follows leading lady (and, incidentally, Welles's companion) Oja Kodar as she walks down the street, ogled at by a number of men. Often filmed with only her torso and legs in view and her head out of the frame, it could be argued that Kodar suffers a similar fate of anonymity as Hayworth; yet the audience later learns that Kodar herself is in collusion with the experiment in "girl-watching" captured therein. Moreover, as the movie continues, Welles goes on to celebrate Kodar as a vibrant, active embodiment of the Eternal Feminine – a musing upon the aesthetic inspiration of "authentic" femininity that stands in direct opposition to Hayworth's cinematic exile in *The Lady from Shanghai*.

Elsa: I don't want to die.

In his reading of Elsa, Conrad describes her as "the white goddess – unfeeling, implacable, spectral not carnal" (233). Critics like Fischer and E. Ann Kaplan have also commented upon the mythological elements of Elsa's character: the former aptly comparing Elsa to a sphinx and even Narcissus, the latter to the

archetypal Mother of the Oedipus complex (Fischer 39; Kaplan 65). Eradicating any appeal in these allusions, including Hayworth's implicit connection to Terpsichore, Welles instead creates a collective symbol of eternal feminine narcissism in all its threatening shallowness and insubstantiality. Indeed, his insistence on placing Hayworth-as-star amongst these mythical, now-threatening abstractions both undermines and betrays the corporeal integrity of her lived-body. The process of devolution appears in its most defining moment in the series of extreme close-ups that capture Elsa/Hayworth singing "Please Don't Kiss Me," a scene that exemplifies what Britton calls her "reduc[tion] to an icon" (220).

Throughout the film, Welles inserts close-ups of the three main male characters – Michael, Grisby, and Bannister (Everett Sloane), Elsa's husband – that are anything but idealizing. So close as to capture sweat and pores, the shots insist upon a proximity to the men in their torment and lust that connotes the grotesque as much as the realist (particularly in the shots of Grisby). The extreme shots of Elsa, however, present not a closer look at a mortal entity but cold observation of an ominously ethereal creature. As Elsa reclines, the shots frame her from above and present her as an expanse of symmetrical features and platinum tones of hair and skin. Quite appropriately, McLean describes Elsa/Hayworth's face in this sequence as a "mask of...death" representing the "artificiality of...the genus Movie Star" (152). Indeed, where the body-landscape

conceptualized by Beugnet allows for the existence of a space liberated from the parameters of cultural and gender signification, here Elsa/Hayworth's body-landscape presents a kind of Elysian field of the human form – a shadow realm in which the corporeal life force has given way to a ghostly rendering thereof. Stark and forbidding, the eerie luminescence of these shots recalls Gilles Deleuze's caveat in his discussion of the moral implications of light ("good") and dark ("evil") in the work of directors like Bresson and Dreyer: "The white which *imprisons* the light is worth no more than the black, which remains foreign to it" (emphasis mine; 113 – 114).

At the end of *F for Fake*, Welles performs a final act of magic (or trickery?) by levitating the body of Oja Kodar's grandfather. Shrouded in a white sheet with only the outline of his form visible, the man floats higher into the air until Welles removes the sheet with a flourish to uncover absolutely nothing. It is a feat that finds its antecedent in the series of close-ups of Elsa/Hayworth: First showing her to be laid out like a corpse on the deck of her husband's yacht, Welles proceeds to overlay her body with the oppressive close-ups and their corrosive sheen. Just as removing the shroud shows the absence of Kodar's grandfather (who, Welles then tells us, never actually existed), the fade-out of the shot allows the audience to see Hayworth-as-Elsa vanishing in its sight. As both magician and director, Welles sets out to prove that, as he himself quotes from Picasso while levitating the "grandfather," "Art is a lie that makes us

realize the truth.” And the truth revealed through the artistry (or trickery?) of *The Lady from Shanghai* is the immateriality of Rita Hayworth.

The final sequence of the film, taking place in the hall of mirrors of an abandoned amusement park, is the apex of this exploration of the tension between the true and false, the fake and genuine. After Michael realizes the extent of Elsa’s evil nature and the complexity of her plot to kill her husband, he offers her some kind of chance at salvation from herself: “...Haven’t you heard ever of something better to follow [than your own nature]?”; to which Elsa replies after a chilling pause, “No.” Where *femmes fatales* like *Double Indemnity*’s Phyllis Dietrichson or *Postman*’s Cora have at least a moment of redemptive ambiguity before their deaths, leaving a hopeful shadow of a doubt in their wake, Elsa Bannister is shown to be beyond saving – or, perhaps, a narcissist not *worth* saving. For a character unaware of a world beyond that one ruled by her own desires, there is meant to be some poetic justice in the scene of Elsa’s death – she, Michael, and Bannister shooting at each other in a “magic mirror maze” in which both the corporeal entity and its reflection are shattered. In the instants before the shoot-out, in one last evocation of her ghostly aura, still close-ups of Elsa appear hazily over the shots of Bannister and Michael, her frozen visage now shrouding the flesh of the film from which she had been exiled.

Literally fore-shadowing the carnage that occurs immediately thereafter, Elsa's presence signals not reconciliation but destruction.



The hall of mirrors.

In her psychoanalytic reading of *The Lady from Shanghai*, Kaplan remarks that this sequence represents the annihilation of Elsa as “an empty signifier, a pure ego-ideal” and, moreover, the “shattering of the world of the imaginary...[and] the world of the film” (69, 70). Commenting upon the image of the aftermath of the shoot-out, with its cold white light capturing the shattered glass and victims, Kaplan notes, “It is as though we have gone *through* the mirror, *through* illusion, and are standing on the barren, other side” (71). Certainly one could interpret this sequence as Welles's last gesture of revelation, his final triumph over the hollowness of the “movie star.” He has removed the shroud, the seductive luster of style, to enlighten his spectators and show them the broken reality behind it – as McLean describes it, he has created an “image emptied of content, of background, of tension” (161). Afterwards, Welles-as-Michael leaves Hayworth-as-Elsa to, as André Bazin succinctly states, “die like a bitch on the floor” (*Welles* 94).

But in a magic trick of her own, Rita Hayworth – the star – comes back to life.⁵³ Wounded fatally, Elsa staggers from the wreckage of the shoot-out under the shocked gaze of Michael, who follows her out of the maze to watch her collapse. In her analysis of the movie, McLean discusses the significance of Elsa’s utter lack of movement throughout: “Elsa is moved or transported” in a restriction of Hayworth’s trademark motility (154). Yet as Elsa fights her imminent death, she projects a resurgence of this energy (admittedly limited) by dragging *herself* along the floor in the foreground of a tracking shot whilst Michael stands in the background with his back to her, pontificating about good and evil, winning and losing. Where Welles’s voice dominates the soundtrack, it is Hayworth herself who fully inhabits and lays claim to the visual dimension with her inimitable presence. In a stunning medium close-up, Elsa/Hayworth holds the top of her body up on her forearms, rising into the frame with a surge of her former dynamism; her smile revealed for the first time in the film in bravura defiance before death, her eyes finally open and expressive, Hayworth speaks for Elsa with an anguished passion far removed from her earlier monotone: “It’s true...I made a lot of mistakes.” As her face moves in and out of the shadows, a depth and substantiality appears across its features, showing not only the contours of her cheekbones but a swelling under her eyes and

⁵³ This image of resurrection complements Maurice Bessy’s description of the cutting and bleaching of the star’s hair as “the execution of Rita Hayworth” (in McLean 149).

lines on her forehead – Hayworth in her reality, neither glamorized by Technicolor gloss nor made immaterial by Welles’s frigid patina of platinum. Elsa dies, Michael exonerates himself, but for a single moment in the film, Hayworth lives.

Michael: That’s a big word, ‘innocent.’

In an interview on the difficulties of making *The Lady from Shanghai*, Welles generously proclaimed, “...I’m not bitter. It taught me how to shoot a sexy dame singing a song and stuff like that” (in McLean 239n44). Perhaps it would be more precise to say, however, that Welles used the film to teach others about Hollywood-produced fakery. But to paraphrase the question posed in Kipling’s refrain, Welles did this – but was it art or artifice? In his determination to prove the in-authenticity of the studio system and its “sexy dames,” Welles deconstructs Hayworth’s unique star presence and replaces it with a fake, a ghost of her photogenic dimensionality in the life force of cinema. Yet in the final twist of the film, Hayworth proves her resilience. Expressive and animated, offering the reality of her existence as a lived-body to the camera, Hayworth reveals the charlatanism of the “master of Art and Truth” himself.

VI.

Conclusion: “The spirit never really ages.”

Immediately before Michael leaves Elsa at the conclusion of *The Lady from Shanghai*, she asks him to “give my regards to the sunrise.” Bitterly sardonic, Elsa’s remark is a dark reprise of the final

musical number of *Cover Girl*, in which only a few years earlier the three main cast members had danced into the dawn to “make way for tomorrow.” Indeed, even in spite of Hayworth’s revival, Welles’s shattering of the image of Hollywood and its stars as inviolate represents a defining moment in this project’s reading of classic cinema. As the next chapter will discuss, the future of the dream factory and its leading ladies became something to reevaluate rather than take for granted: the hall of mirrors had to be rebuilt. At the beginning of the 1950s, films like Joseph Mankiewicz’s *All About Eve* (1950), Vincent Minnelli’s *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), and Billy Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) deliberately referenced Hollywood’s already-legendary past through stars like Bette Davis, Gloria Swanson, and Lana Turner – all actresses who bore in their very presences the memory of a time before an ideal could be challenged as a fake or rendered expendable at the whim of a director.

Rita Hayworth, of course, emerged from the magic mirror maze and entered this era of transition for female stardom. At the end of the 1940s and into the beginning of the 1950s, her iconic status as the “Love Goddess” made her image and name synonymous with *haute* Hollywood: In 1948, a poster of *Gilda* appeared in Italian neo-realist classic *The Bicycle Thief* (Vittorio De Sica); John Huston’s 1953 *Beat the Devil* references Hayworth as a symbol of American glamour; and Mankiewicz named her as the inspiration for

his 1954 drama *The Barefoot Contessa* (starring Ava Gardner). After her marriage to Prince Aly Khan in 1949, Hayworth intended to retire from acting; but upon their separation in 1952, she returned to Hollywood to star in *Affair in Trinidad* (Vincent Sherman, 1952), a vehicle that paired her with Glenn Ford once again in a virtual remake of *Gilda*. In the later part of the decade, in films like *Fire Down Below* and *Separate Tables*, Hayworth presented a different dimension of her *photogénie* to the camera, the living figure seen at the end of *The Lady from Shanghai* continuing to prove its existential reality. Maturing into the more overtly regal presence first glimpsed in *Down to Earth*, Hayworth played world-weary women who nonetheless retained their sensual appeal. Subdued rather than vivacious, Hayworth's magnetism evolved from the kinetically inspired attraction of *Cover Girl* and *Gilda* to an equally seductive stillness.

Though Hayworth's relationship to the filmic bodies of her later career remained immediate and affective regardless of the transformation of her photogenic impact, the narrative strategies for addressing this change bordered on the sensationalist. In *Fire Down Below*, for example, Hayworth's character resists the love of a younger man, telling him, "I'm all worn out, I've been passed from hand to hand...I've lived among the ruins; armies have marched over me." Long before the fate of the "aging actress" became a *cause célèbre*, Hollywood attempted to find a way to contend with the

passage of time as it manifested itself on the form of its quintessential goddess; if “tears are only for mortals,” then dialogue like this bespeaks an uneasy recognition of Hayworth’s own reality. Moreover, in further considering Hayworth’s “real life” and the profoundly unhappy events that shaded much of it – with works like Barbara Leaming’s biography of the star musing fretfully, *If This Was Happiness...* – it is tempting to ascribe some greater sense of revelation to such a monologue. The truth of Hayworth’s legacy as a star, however, lies not in revisionist readings but in the present tense of the films themselves and the life force contained therein. As Mr. Jordan tells Terpsichore at the end of *Down to Earth*, “The spirit never really ages.”

Indeed, it is Hayworth’s evocation of both physical presence and ethereal essence that renders her rapport with the cinematic entity such a uniquely transcendent union, a symbiotic engagement that exceeds any exigencies of narcissism called for in the narratives of the films. Embodying the active, dynamic vitality of film itself whilst projecting corporeal facticity in its lived dimensions, Hayworth attests to the significance of the star as more than an empty ego-ideal or illusion of perfection – in her engagement with the materiality of the filmic body, she reveals the substance that underlies the ineffable grace described by Morin. Laura U. Marks writes that “materiality is mortality” (*Touch* xi); for Rita Hayworth, it is also proof of life.

Chapter V

“Wherever there’s magic”: Performance time in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *All About Eve* (1950)

I.

At the beginning of Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s film *All About Eve*, as Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter) receives an award for her Broadway debut, Karen Richards (Celeste Holm) recalls the first evening she met the young actress. Providing the star-struck girl with an entrée from the stage door of a theatre to the dressing-room of her idol, actress Margo Channing (Bette Davis), Karen inadvertently enables Eve to enact her ruthless plan to displace Margo and become a star herself. With Karen’s memory, articulated through her voice-over narration, comes the introduction of the flashback structure of the diegesis: “When was it? How long? It seems a lifetime ago. Lloyd [her playwright husband] always said that in the theatre, a lifetime was a season, and a season a lifetime.” That is, existence “in the theatre” defines itself not by the more traditional demarcations of temporality – past, present, future; beginning, middle, end – but instead through the passage between a series of moments defined only in their relationship to spectacle: rehearsing for a play and actually performing therein; engaging with the reality of life off the stage and *bringing* to life a constructed narrative on the stage. A realm liberated from the constraints of the quotidian, the theatrical sphere described by Karen is a dimension unto itself.

As Billy Wilder demonstrates in *Sunset Boulevard*, this unique space takes shape in Hollywood as well as Broadway. Released the same year as *All About Eve*, Wilder's film recounts (also in flashback, from the supernatural perspective of a dead protagonist) the demise of Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson), a star of silent films who has been forgotten in Hollywood's transition to talking pictures. After a fateful meeting in Norma's mansion on Sunset Boulevard, screenwriter Joe Gillis (William Holden) becomes ensnared in the older woman's blind desperation to make a return to her erstwhile fame. When Joe attempts to quit his roles as Norma's lover and ghostwriter, the former star murders him. Crafting an eerie alignment between Norma's past and present rapport with her filmic image – the glory of her youth as a star and its haunting of her middle-age off the screen – *Sunset Boulevard*, like *All About Eve*, explores the place of the actress in the world of performance and its ability to subvert the exigencies of reality. In their disparate situations of stardom – Norma in decline, Margo at her peak, and Eve beginning her ascent – the women of both films seek to redefine their relationships to this dimension of transcendence; a dimension made manifest on the screen through Mankiewicz and Wilder's construction of a spatio-temporal context, or what theorist M. M. Bakhtin has termed a "chronotope," unto itself.

In his essay "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," Bakhtin develops the concept of the chronotope in relation to literary

genres, tracing the various narrative environments within which “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (84). With a resistance to an abstract understanding of place and temporality, Bakhtin describes an artistic time-space in which grounded material coordinates and the progression of time intertwine to “make...narrative events concrete, make...them take on flesh, cause...blood to flow in their veins” (250). Transposing these existential concerns from literature to cinema, Vivian Sobchack extends the notion of the chronotope to film studies in an exploration of the significance of time and space in *film noir*.⁵⁴ In her essay “Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir,” Sobchack analyses the milieu of “transients and transience” – cocktail lounges, hotel rooms, and diners – that provide the spatial context for a disenfranchised, disillusioned post-World War II American society (138). In contrast to the ordered, cohesive existences represented by the intimate domestic spaces of the home-front, the topology of lounge time provides the material premises within which an equally fractured, unsettled temporality reveals itself. Idle and anonymous rather than idyllic and personal, lounge time in *noir* “grounds the meaning of the

⁵⁴ Technically, Michael V. Montgomery’s 1993 study, *Carnivals and Commonplaces: Bakhtin’s Chronotope, Cultural Studies, and Film* precedes Sobchack’s essay; in considering that his work offers a fairly straightforward application of Bakhtin’s chronotopes to various Hollywood works, however, this chapter will take Sobchack’s phenomenological approach as a point of departure.

world for the uprooted, the unemployed, the loose, the existentially paralyzed” (167).

With Sobchack’s concept serving as a paradigm of the possibilities of the cinematic chronotope, the distinct spatio-temporal character of *Sunset Boulevard* and *All About Eve* takes shape – not in the tradition of lounge time, but rather in what this chapter will term “performance time.” It is a dimension comprised of sites significant only in their relationship to the screen or stage – movie-star mansions, studio lots, dressing rooms, theatres – and ordered by a poignant temporality formed by the glory of the past, the what-could-be of the future, and the present that provides the threshold between them. Definitively associated with the female stars who occupy this chronotope, performance time provides an existential context for those actresses caught between a dissatisfying reality and a need to either (re)claim or redefine an ideal image of themselves as projected on the screen or presented on-stage. Moreover, in considering that Norma Desmond, Margo Channing, and Eve Harrington share that sphere of performativity with the stars who embody them – icons Gloria Swanson and Bette Davis, ingénue Anne Baxter – this chronotope further allows for an exploration of the identity of the extra-diegetic movie star within the Hollywood of the early 1950s. Overlaying the off-screen reality of the close of the studio-era with an on-screen vision of that dream factory, the performance time of

these films extends beyond the parameters of narrative to craft the coordinates of Hollywood itself.

Performance time: the idyll of the idol

In his outlining of the concept of the chronotope, Bakhtin calls for the reader's "*living* artistic perception" – an understanding of the given literary milieu that considers the "temporal and spatial determinations [as] inseparable from one another, and always colored by emotions and values" (243). Intertwined and interdependent, informed by the reader's knowledge of the lived-world, the narrative sequence-of-events and the time-space in which they play out exist together in an environment of substance rather than abstraction. Through this deliberate construction of multi-dimensionality, the chronotope allows for a process of vivification; the metamorphosis of the "philosophical and social generalizations, ideas" that guide the spirit of the work into "flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work" (250) on a physical plane. With Sobchack's own theoretical concerns so focused upon the materiality of the literally "imaging power" of cinema, her reading of the chronotope provides a further investigation of what she calls the "experienced truth" of both the filmic entity and the living perception of the spectator (137).

Approaching *noir* with an appreciation of both its broader historical placement – as a movement responding to the desolation wrought by World War II – and its particular time-space as

represented on the screen – the anonymous sites inhabited by individuals caught in sinister cycles of desire and betrayal – Sobchack highlights the function of the cinematic chronotope as, like its literary counterpart, “the spatiotemporal currency between” actual, experienced historicity and artistic expression (150). With its concrete rendering of the transient nature of postwar culture, Sobchack’s lounge time offers a negative alternative to what Bakhtin terms the chronotope of the “idyll”; the charmed “unity of place,” that is, in which the sites of experience and the passage of time cohere to form, in Bakhtin’s words, a “little...world...sufficient unto itself” (225). In contrast, lounge time presents, as Sobchack writes, “the perverse ‘idyll of the idle’” (167) within a ruptured, disenfranchised societal consciousness.

Where World War II and its aftermath presented a dark inspiration for *noir* cinematic works, the demise of the studio system in the latter part of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s began a parallel era of disruption and fragmentation within Hollywood itself. In 1947, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began its pervasive and destructive investigation into Communist activity within the film industry (Schatz 434). The next year, a Supreme Court decision known as the *Paramount* decree determined that the major studios held a monopoly over the theatrical distribution and exhibition of their films. With this anti-trust suit came a series of mandates that completely undermined the

dominance of the studio system: Companies were ordered to divest their interests in theatre chains, and further forbidden to engage in any “privileged arrangements” with theatre owners in the showing of their films (Schatz 435). In this way, particular focus on individual films replaced the massive output and exhibition of motion pictures as regulated by the studio system of production and distribution.

Utterly destabilized by this forced revolution in the industry, studios faced not only the autonomy of now-freelance stars and directors once held to the constraints of a contract, but also the wandering interest of the public itself. As Tino Balio notes, radio programming and, most significantly, the burgeoning medium of television claimed the attention of postwar, suburban audiences (3). Sobering statistics reveal the gravity of Hollywood’s situation: Between 1949 and 1953, weekly attendance at movie theatres fell from 87.5 million to 46 million; and by the close of the 1950s, the figure decreased to only 40 million (in Belton 212). Desperate to reclaim its public and revitalize film viewing, studios developed techniques like CinemaScope, Cinerama, and 3-D – all of which sought to offer an impressive, immersive experience not accessible in the implicitly domestic milieu of television.

Yet Hollywood’s reevaluation of its role in American culture provoked more than such commercial novelties. Seeking redefinition and a measure of self-reflexivity within a troubled decade that disclosed the fallibility of its once-insulated, inviolate domain,

Hollywood released a series of “movies about movies” and their stars. Indeed, as the 1950s went on, the context of reflexive cinema presented a greater protective framework for the city and its industry. Films like *Sunset Boulevard* and *All About Eve*⁵⁵ exemplify this process of self-definition; but even beyond Wilder and Mankiewicz’s works, the early 1950s produced a number of motion pictures that explored the workings of Hollywood, ranging from melodramatic accounts (*The Bad and the Beautiful*, Vincente Minnelli, 1952; *The Star*, Stuart Heisler, 1952; *The Barefoot Contessa*, Mankiewicz, 1954) to musicals (*Singin’ in the Rain*, Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952; *The Band Wagon*, Minnelli, 1953; and *A Star is Born*, George Cukor, 1954).⁵⁶

Furthermore, bio-pics of great stars in Hollywood history became as popular as “insider stories” like *The Bad and the Beautiful* and *The Barefoot Contessa*. Seeking to generate not only commercial success but a cultural mythology, the dream factory crafted itself as such in films like *Valentino* (Lewis Allen, 1951); *I’ll Cry Tomorrow* (with Susan Hayward as Lillian Roth; Daniel Mann, 1955); *Man of a Thousand Faces* (the story of Lon Chaney, starring

⁵⁵ Though *All About Eve* examines the world of performance within the context of the Broadway theatre, its revelatory analysis of female stars and their relationships to fame, aging, and identities-in-transition (not to mention the presences of Bette Davis and a starlet Marilyn Monroe) places the film in the canon of Hollywood’s self-reflexive works.

⁵⁶ In their study *Hollywood’s Hollywood: The Movies about the Movies*, Rudy Behlmer and Tony Thomas note that Hollywood was producing self-reflexive works from its very inception. The historical context of a 1950s American cinema in transition, however, lends unique significance to this moment in Hollywood’s self-definition and awareness.

James Cagney; Joseph Pevney, 1957); and *Jeanne Eagels* (starring Kim Novak; George Sidney, 1957) – among many others. As W.J.T. Mitchell describes it, such “backlot films” convey an “institutional memory” of Hollywood itself (100). Early in *Sunset Boulevard*, Norma tells Joe that the transition to talking pictures drove the studios to “[take] the idols and smash them”; in relating this statement to the equally conflicted close of the studio era, it could be said that the series of “movies about movies” sought to reconstruct the fallen idols and their Hollywood sanctuary.

For through these (often only remotely accurate) retellings of the stars’ lives and original fiction productions, Hollywood sought a measure of constancy and restorative control within its own shifting identity by defining itself as the perennial landscape against which myriad triumphs and tragedies played out. As envisioned through the series of works, Hollywood stands as a locale as complex as its inhabitants: a town that nurtures rising stars while it cruelly neglects those who have passed the peak of their success; a place that celebrates and seeks authentic talent even as it enables the fame of shallower performers. With the prevalence of flashbacks within the majority of these works, even time itself operates as a vexed phenomenon – the past and present depicted as irrevocably intertwined temporal modes in the lifetimes of Hollywood’s inhabitants.

It is upon these coordinates, ever retraced and traversed within the films, that the chronotope of performance time takes shape in *Sunset Boulevard* and *All About Eve*. Beginning with the greater spatial context of Hollywood itself, the topology of this time-space includes the motifs of film sets and theatre stages, back-lots and dressing rooms, opulent mansions and glamorous apartments – all sites that find their meaning in relation to and as extensions of the screen or stage itself and the moments of ideality experienced by the women who so inhabit it. These are locales of rehearsal and expectation, of nostalgia and regret. Granting further dimensionality to this space is the temporal structure of performance time, a chronology most often associated with the flashback.⁵⁷ Through this device, the present operates as a threshold of suspension across which the characters may negotiate both the past – a register always already set in motion by an even more distant anteriority (Norma’s zenith in the silent era, Margo’s established successes, Eve’s vague background) – and the future, an amorphous, romanticized realm defined by hopes of eventual fame and glory. If Sobchack’s *noir* universe represents the “idyll of the idle,” then the performance time

⁵⁷ In her analysis of the significance of the flashback technique in such works, Maureen Turim describes the films as “psycho-histories of Hollywood” (133): that is, movies that focus on the past and present experiences of various individuals in the industry in order to examine the greater context of Hollywood itself. Turim interprets these films as avoiding overt censure of Hollywood by transferring “tales of ambition and neuroses” to its residents, in this way “converting the moment of self-criticism into another melodramatic entertainment to be exploited commercially” (133). The design of these productions, however, bespeaks not only a desire to protect the industry from condemnation but also a need to reclaim Hollywood from the limbo of the post-studio-system era.

of self-reflexive Hollywood works places its narcissistic heroines within the idyll of the *idol*.

Where the screen, stage, and their accompanying sites represent the spatial media through which the Norma, Margo, and Eve may gain access to the ideality they seek, the actual physical form of the movie screen itself – the “‘fleshly’ boundaries” so described by Sobchack in *The Address of the Eye* (210) – also offers its own time-space to the extra-diegetic spectator. In approaching the film as a subjective and lived entity in its perception and expression of phenomena, the viewer attunes him/herself to the sensory dimensions relayed through and projected on the screen. In this way, Laura U. Marks’s theory of hapticity provides a means of understanding the importance of the fleshly boundaries of the human body itself in the experience of cinema. Deliberately engaging with the film as a dynamic, evolving visual entity, the spectator inhabits his/her own time-space – one in which the body works as a channel for the sensuous appreciation of the tactile and olfactory dimensionality of the cinematic image (*Skin* 163). Further, a haptic perspective can, as Marks writes, “bring us to the direct experience of time *through*” the human form (*ibid*) in its relationship to the existential situation of the cinematic form. Calling for the spectator’s “co-presence” (164) with the visions on the screen, Marks proposes a corporeal dialogue that “privileges the material presence of the image” (163). With this evocation of the spectator’s

phenomenological capacities, both Marks and Sobchack implicitly suggest the cinematic counterpart to Bakhtin's "living artistic perception" (243) – the interchange, that is, between the Bakhtinian "flesh and blood" (250) of the filmic chronotope and the sensual parameters of the spectator's own physicality.

In a scene between Eve and Karen in *All About Eve*, the latter remarks, "Nothing is forever in the theatre. Whatever it is, it's here, flares up, burns hot, and then it's gone." It is that "here" of ideality and performativity, as well as its surrounding environs of hopefulness and striving, that the chronotope of performance time captures. In this dimension that extends beyond the boundaries of narrative to affect both the historicity of Hollywood and the relationship of the spectator to the filmic entity, the female star stands as a figure of commensurate resonance. Moving between diegetic character and personal star presence, the legacy of the past and possibilities of the future, Norma/Swanson, Margo/Davis, and Eve/Baxter embody not only narrative identities but the existential situation of 1950s Hollywood and its residents. These actresses, both in extra- and intra-diegetic terms, are indeed the flesh and blood inhabitants of performance time; and together, chronotope and star awaken the living perception of the spectator.

II.

"Why have you kept me waiting so long?": Reanimation
in *Sunset Boulevard*

In his description of the intersection between reality and fantasy in the life of a movie star, Morin writes:

Her mythic power changed into real power that can modify films and scenarios and direct the destiny of her admirers, *the star is of the same double nature as the heroes of mythologies – mortals aspiring to immortality, candidates for divinity...half-men, half-gods.* (*The Stars* 87)

At the height of her career, Gloria Swanson represented just such a dual entity: a figure whose magnetism on the screen translated into an authority off the screen, influencing the production of the very films that ensured her cinematic immortality for enrapt audiences. A product of Hollywood's silent era and what Morin calls its "mythico-real...sublime, eccentric" (8) decadence, Swanson existed (along with contemporaries like Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and Rudolph Valentino) as a quintessential "candidate for divinity" revered and, moreover, coveted by fans. As Swanson wrote in her 1981 autobiography, "I was...public property" (129).



Swanson and Valentino, 1924. Photographed by Edward Steichen, 1924.

Truly, Swanson's life matched the scripts of her films for romantic drama. She was married six times, with actor Wallace Beery and the Marquis de la Falaise de la Coudraye among her husbands; and she had a lengthy affair with Joseph P. Kennedy. Raised in Chicago, Swanson traveled to Hollywood as a teenager and worked in Mack Sennett comedies before joining Paramount Studios in 1919 (Staggs 55, 98). There, she earned up to a million dollars a year and made several films with Cecil B. DeMille, including *Don't Change Your Husband* (1919), *Why Change Your Wife?* (1920), and *The Affairs of Anatol* (1921, also featuring Wallace Reid). In 1924, she starred with Rudolph Valentino in *Beyond the Rocks* (Sam Wood, 1924); and in 1928, she was nominated for an Academy Award for her performance as *Sadie Thompson* (directed by Raoul Walsh) (ibid).⁵⁸

Swanson's experience making *Queen Kelly* in 1928, however, exemplifies the wielding of both "mythic power" and "real power" discussed by Morin. Producing the film with lover Kennedy, Swanson starred as a convent-girl-turned-prostitute in an epic of thwarted lust conceived by Erich von Stroheim. An émigré from Austria, Stroheim had already established himself as the perfectionist filmmaker of opulent productions like *Greed* (1924) and *The Merry Widow* (1925). But by the middle of filming *Queen Kelly*, Stroheim's fanatical attention to detail, as well as his preoccupation

⁵⁸ A film adaptation of W. Somerset Maugham's short story.

with crafting a work of grotesque eroticism, had completely alienated Swanson. In a gesture asserting her authority over her on-screen image, Swanson fired Stroheim (Swanson 372; Staggs 257). It was a decision that, to recall Morin's words, "direct[ed] the destiny" of the production towards destruction: Stroheim's career as a director ended; Swanson lost almost a million dollars and the positive momentum of her career; and *Queen Kelly*, never completed, is now legendary as a near-masterpiece in both Stroheim and Swanson's respective *oeuvres*. Ultimately, the history of *Queen Kelly* reveals, in part, the hubris that underlies Morin's account of the "half-god" movie star.

It is, then, the tragedy of the film star's striving "double nature" that Wilder examines in his creation of Norma Desmond, an emblematic silent-era celebrity who, like Swanson herself, held her fans enthralled with her exploits and excesses. As the audience learns, at her peak Norma "in one week received 17,000 fan letters; men bribed her hairdresser to get a lock of her hair." In the performance time of *Sunset Boulevard*, however, the epoch of Norma's former fame and the present tense of contemporary Hollywood are literally *place*-d in opposition. Where the hybridity of mortality and immortality had defined Norma's existence as a star, the transposition of this Morinian "mythico-reality" into spatial terms reveals a limbo of vexed identities; one in which Norma may maintain her memories of glory in a mansion-retreat on Sunset

Boulevard, only streets away and yet a lifetime beyond the movie studios and city in which her once “mythic power” now means nothing. In depicting this time-space, *Sunset Boulevard* aligns the cinematic bodies (the stars, films) of Hollywood’s past and present in a process of uncanny reanimation – as if in dialogue with Norma’s paradoxically poignant and sinister demand at the beginning of the film: “Why have you kept me waiting so long?”

Appropriately enough, one of the most defining moments of resurrection in *Sunset Boulevard* takes place in a sequence that provides the coda to the extra-diegetic *Queen Kelly* saga that began decades earlier. With Stroheim cast as Max, Norma’s former husband and once-promising director who now serves as her butler, Wilder’s film provided the context for a reunion between the two figures – as well as a glimpse of the unfinished movie itself. After Joe Gillis has moved into Norma’s mansion on Sunset Boulevard, ghostwriting a script that she hopes will enable her “return,” the young man and the aging star spend an evening watching one of Norma’s silent films. The scene begins with a medium shot of Joe and Norma seated in the darkened salon of her home, which has now transformed into a theatre through the uncovering of a screen and projector hidden within the walls. Making explicit the intersection between Norma’s domestic and performative spheres, the omnipresence of her cinematic past, the sequence recalls phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard’s comment in *The Poetics of*

Space that “the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind” (6). In its spatio-temporal integration of Norma’s memories and dreams, the mansion stands as the concretized *zeitgeist* of the performance time of *Sunset Boulevard*.

After Joe’s guiding voice-over subsides, there is a cut to a medium shot of the back of his and Norma’s heads as they watch the screen itself, hanging on the wall of her living room with various framed photographs of the actress placed, as if on an altar, below. The following shot presents simply the screen-within-the-frame, a flickering opalescence within which a youthful Norma/Swanson emotes. With the clicking of the projector breaking the silence of the soundtrack, and with intertitles from the movie appearing on the screen-within-the-frame, *Sunset Boulevard* here deliberately evokes the aesthetic experience of a silent film. Gilles Deleuze links this experience directly to the “function of the *eye*,” remarking, “The silent image is composed from the seen image, and the intertitle which is read” (emphasis mine; *Cinema II* 225). Yet even as Wilder acknowledges the emphasis on the eye and “the seen” that defines this form of cinematic exhibition and spectatorship, the words of Joe’s voice-over allow for an exploration of the *interplay* which is *felt* by the body as a whole in an expansion of the sensory parameters of the film.

Marks has written that a haptic appreciation allows the spectator to “perceive...with all the senses. It involves thinking with your skin, or giving...significance to the physical presence of an other” (*Touch* 18). In this scene, Joe’s voice-over clearly insists that the audience “give as much significance” to the physical depth of the scene as its more abstract narrative significance:

She’d sit very close to me, and she’d smell of tuberose, which is not my favorite perfume – not by a long shot. Sometimes as we watched, she’d clutch my arm or my hand, forgetting she was my employer; just becoming a fan, excited about that actress up there.

In the medium shot of Joe and Norma that illustrates the voice-over, the latter grips the young man’s arm in a grounding, oppressive gesture that contrasts the drifting of cigarette smoke as it wafts through the light of the projector; and with the attention to the “tactile and olfactory” affect discussed by Marks (*Skin* 163), the scene awakens both Norma’s capacity for action and the spectator’s capacity for *reaction* as s/he lives out his/her own physicality through that of the shot’s inhabitants.⁵⁹ With the profound, if oppressive, corporeality of Norma, the star is no longer a ghost lost to the memory of silent films but an active presence in a time-space that exceeds the frame of the shots to impact the sensual construct of the body itself – both *of* and *off* the screen.

⁵⁹ Wilder had already briefly explored the sensory parameters of film in *Double Indemnity*, in which the doomed Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) ruefully remarks in voice-over, “How could I have known that murder can sometimes smell like honeysuckle?”



Swanson as *Queen Kelly*.

Even as this scene expands the off-screen audience's sensorial investment in *Sunset Boulevard*, it also highlights the myopic nature of Norma's own spectatorship. In her article on the film, Lucy Fischer observes that Norma "seems almost to 'feed' on her youthful persona" (*Sunset* 168) with a narcissistic vision that offers a vampiric variation on the traditional spectator-star rapport. Norma's immersion in the film, however, extends beyond a need for *supernatural* reanimation to an utterly corporeal craving for the vivification that the filmic body represents. At the conclusion of the sequence, Norma breaks away from her seat in the "audience" and cries, "Haven't they got any eyes? Have they forgotten what a star looks like? I'll show them. I'll be up there again, so help me!" Standing in the solitary beam of light from the projector, she places herself between it and the screen – the two apparatuses that enable the continuing existence of her former self – in her lust for, to paraphrase Marks, the experience of performance time through her aging body. In contrast to the symbiotic affinity between Rita

Hayworth's physicality and the cinematic entity discussed in the previous chapter, Norma imposes her presence upon the filmic form with a desperation and urgency; as Amy Lawrence notes, "She is searching for a way back in" (158).



Between projector and screen.

With her physical form occupying a space between the on-screen projection of her past and a mansion shielding her from a prohibitive present; not acting but *waiting* to act, Norma lives a conditional existence as the half-god, half-mortal of which Morin wrote. Moreover, this moment in the film captures the nexus between Norma and Swanson's respective personas in an unsettling instance of Morin's theory of osmosis between star and role – and also provides a commentary on the place of the extra-diegetic star in 1950s Hollywood. In her portrayal of Norma, Swanson engages with a kind of phantom contemporary as much as a fictional character, a fellow "candidate for divinity" who suffers the very forlorn fate from which *Sunset Boulevard* redeems Swanson. As Wilder himself remarked, Norma was "absolutely [a living, breathing person]. She

was a real character, who had lived, who could be living on Sunset Boulevard” (in Crowe 304). Unlike Norma, Swanson (eventually) made the transition from silents to talkies; and rather than languish in the half-memory of a changing Hollywood, Swanson participated in the making of a movie that commented upon that shifting industry. Even Swanson’s (and, for that matter, Stroheim’s) near-epic turn in *Queen Kelly* found new life in the greater animating force of Wilder’s film. Ultimately, Swanson realized Norma’s dream of being “up there again.” Reflecting the unique fluidity of performance time, then, the intimate space of identity-interplay between Norma and Swanson finds itself on the exploration of each woman’s might-have-been.

Joe: I sure turned into an interesting driveway.

Where the *Queen Kelly* sequence offers a microcosmic depiction of the role of Norma’s mansion in the time-space of the film, the film goes on to emphasize its significance as a sanctuary in which the actress may escape from the outside world. In contrast to Joe’s hyper-defined spatial context – a veritable street-map of 1950s Hollywood in which the young screenwriter drives from the Alto-Nido Apartments near Rudy’s Shoe-Shine Parlor to Paramount Studios and Schwab’s Drugstore, moving swiftly through the landscape of modernity in anticipation of his future – Norma lives in what he calls a “grim Sunset castle” bounded by her memories of a lost world.

After getting a flat tire while trying to evade his creditors, Joe hides his car in the garage of what he thinks is an empty house, “the kind crazy movie people built in the crazy twenties.” Norma’s is a lair like that described by Bakhtin in terms of “castle time”: a domain in which décor and “legends...animate every corner of the castle and its environs through their constant reminders of past events” (246). When Joe moves into a room over the garage later that evening, Joe stands at the window and further appraises his surroundings in voice-over:

The whole place seemed to have been stricken with a kind of creeping paralysis, out of beat with the rest of the world, coming apart in slow-motion. There was a tennis court, or rather the ghost of a tennis court...And of course she had a pool...Mabel Normand and John Gilbert must have swum in it 10,000 midnights ago.

Illustrating Joe’s words are point-of-view long shots of the tennis court and empty pool, exterior locales awash in a cold moonlight that does nothing to conceal their decay. Yet through Joe’s meditation on his surroundings and the duration of the point-of-view shots, the viewer perceives both the grounded actuality of the house’s present state and a parallel vision of its past glory – a ghost image, as it were, behind the actuality and evoked by Joe’s words. It is not so much a question of contrast here as of intertwining, the milieu that has “come apart” coming back together again: an off-screen corporeal intelligence assimilating the evidence of devastation while responding to the reverberations of those who inhabited the

space “10,000 midnights ago.” As contemporaries of both Norma and Swanson, Normand and Gilbert assume their place within the animating filmic body, shifting in existence from “10,000 midnights ago” to the performance time of *Sunset Boulevard*.

Further ethereal and material traces of Norma’s past occupy the mansion. In his article on the importance of a star’s home décor in Hollywood promotional materials, Simon Dixon relates that at the height of her success, Swanson herself lived in a lavish home-space that “in a sense still belonged to the studio and was always at its disposal as a site for publicity” (86). Yet Norma’s mansion on Sunset Boulevard, abandoned by the very studio that had financed its faded opulence, is a site not for publicity but the preservation of what-had-been. Soon after Joe’s arrival, an elegant trio of tracking shots linked by two dissolves captures the numerous photographs of Norma as a young woman that crowd a table in her living room. While the camera pans to the right to follow the array of framed images from the star’s youth – by turns smiling, seductive, and solemn – Joe wonders in his voice-over, “How could she breathe in that house so crowded with Norma Desmonds, and more Norma Desmonds, and *still* more Norma Desmonds?” For a narcissist whose existence depends upon both the memory of her former ideality and the dream of its revival, however, the question is how she could breathe in that house *without* those sustaining reflections.

As Fischer remarks, Norma's mansion is "more than a home...[it is] an extension of the woman herself" (167).

Certainly the design of Wilder's camerawork mirrors the almost supernatural aura contained within the house. Scenes fade into each other in such a way that the conclusion of one sequence casts its shadow over the beginning of the next, as though reluctant to relinquish its presence. And early in Joe's stay, a deep-focus shot of Norma's living room places Max's white-gloved, seemingly-disembodied hands in the foreground as he plays the organ, while a diminished Joe stands in the background, surrounded by the excess of Norma's memorabilia – evidencing Janey Place's contention that the house is "a hideous trap" (53) for its inhabitants. It is the moment in which Norma convinces Joe to move into the mansion, however, that exemplifies this magnetism between her energy and the camera. The exchange begins with Norma in medium shot, seated to the left of the frame in a throne-like chair, with a framed photograph of her younger self above her left shoulder. As she insists that her script cannot leave the house and begins to ask Joe about his personal circumstances, the camera slowly but steadily tracks forward. Joe steps into the right of the shot briefly, but the lines of his back only serve to further frame the image on Norma herself. By the time he moves out of the shot, the camera has tracked close enough to place Norma in its center. With the tango theme of Franz Waxman's score heightening the sense of sinister seduction,

the shot – which lasts for over 30 seconds – concludes with Norma’s command, “Why shouldn’t you stay here?” Following the same pull towards Norma that the camera itself experiences, Joe does, of course, stay.

Later, just as he senses the ghostly resonances of Mabel Normand and John Gilbert, Joe encounters others of Norma’s old-Hollywood acquaintance, whom he calls “the waxworks...dim figures you may still remember from the silent days.” Marks has argued that cinema has the ability to “activate inert presences” (201) – bringing to life, as it were, the film clips, co-stars, and photographs that make the ephemerality of Norma’s past a material force in the reality of the present; and certainly the cameos by silent-era stars Buster Keaton, Anna Q. Nilsson, and H.B. Warner represent yet another moment of resurrection for these figures of Hollywood’s dormant, rather than vanished, past. Seated around a table playing bridge with Norma, brief medium shots introduce the actors as they offer fleeting essences to the camera: a guarded look from Nilsson, a distracted wave by Warner, and Keaton’s famously deadpan face. Neither motile nor articulate, the actors seem to belong to the house as organically as the screen and projector hidden within the walls, integrated as wholly into its coordinates as Norma’s dreams and memories. Bachelard notes that a “house furnishes us dispersed images and a body of images at the same time” (3); and in this *Sunset* castle in which time moves between “10,000 midnights ago” and the

vague hope of a comeback in motion pictures, and space is delineated by framed visions of Norma and a bridge table surrounded by other former idols, the body of images it bears awakens to unite with the body of the film itself.

Joe: That's why I took this job – ghostwriting.

In her discussion of *Sunset Boulevard*, Virginia Wright Wexman comments upon the division between the scenes taking place in Norma's "phantasmagoric retreat" and the sequences depicting the "down-to-earth realism" of the world beyond the mansion (150). The transition between the title and opening sequences presages this aesthetic duality that will endure throughout the film, beginning with a shot of asphalt bearing the street name "Sunset Boulevard" in white paint. The shot continues to track swiftly along the street, with credits appearing in the same lettering as the street name, until Joe's voice-over begins to guide the spectator to Norma's home at the end of the road – where Joe's dead body floats in the swimming pool, even as his voice recounts how he came to be there.

Bakhtin has remarked that the motif of the road is "especially appropriate for portraying events governed by chance" (244); and certainly this establishing attention to the asphalt trajectory of Sunset Boulevard introduces the aura of a fateful spatiality that will come to dominate the sites of the film. For beyond understanding that death awaits Joe at the conclusion of his journey along Sunset Boulevard,

the audience watches the opening of the movie with the awareness that literally grounded starkness will give way to pure suspension; the fact of corporeal mortality will intersect with the possibility of an ethereal resurrection. In the voice-over that summons the image dissolve signaling the flashback structure of the narrative, Joe invites the spectator to “go back about six months and find the day when it all started” – he invites him/her to, like the film itself, dissolve the boundaries between past and present, life and death. These beginning moments in the film, then, give rise to the dark magic that crafts the time-space of Joe and Norma’s existences.

The shot of Joe’s body in the swimming pool is one of the most stunning in Hollywood cinema. Executed by art director John Meehan, the shot took shape through the placement of a mirror at the bottom of the swimming pool, with the camera directed at the mirror. While the looking glass captured Joe’s form, the camera filmed that reflection (Staggs 85). The presence of the mirror in this scene bears more than technological importance, however; it also provides a context for the symbolic over-view that Joe has throughout the film. For though Norma’s obsession with her image gives meaning to her very existence, it is ultimately Joe’s process of reflection that brings her back to life. Just as the asphalt of Sunset Boulevard cedes to watery otherworldliness, Joe’s seemingly sightless eyes find renewed vision in the form of a voice-over that, not unlike his floating body, hovers over the image-track. With this in mind, the bird’s-eye shots

contained within two crucial sequences, the New Year's Eve party and Norma's return to Paramount Studios, represent moments of unity between cinematic technique and supernatural diegetic perspective. In these scenes, it is the other side of that mirror at the bottom of the pool – Joe's (dis)embodied gaze – that enables the audience to glimpse Norma Desmond as she negotiates her own troubled relationship to the duality of real and ethereal, material and immaterial established in the opening sequences. Even in his after-life, Joe remains a ghostwriter.



The swimming pool.

He introduces the New Year's party scene in a voice-over that describes it as the site of Norma's "sad and embarrassing revelation" of love. Indeed, the next few minutes of the film radiate a sense of romance gone to waste, an anachronistic pleasure-seeking that nonetheless lingers in the present moment. Dressed in tie-and-tails like the matinee idol of Norma's desires, Joe enters the living room that has been turned into a ballroom – with Norma's portrait gazing down as she herself dances to the tango of an orchestra. Immediately

a tension pervades the sequence, with Joe politely attempting to resist Norma's predatory high spirits. There is an almost metallic quality to Norma's desire to seduce Joe in this scene, a severity in the alliteration of her speech ("Valentino said there's nothing like *tile* for the *tango*") and her desperate coyness that makes her "sad and embarrassing" declaration as oppressive as it is pathetic.

This sharpness in Norma's demeanor, however, renders her a human counterpart to the textural distinctness of the imagery. As in the *Queen Kelly* sequence, the milieu of the New Year's party is one comprised of myriad sensational elements: the bright, reflecting surface of the dance floor upon which the train of Norma's tulle dress drags; the veil on her hair that brushes against Joe's face while they dance; even the defined curls of her carefully coiffed hair and the sparkle of her diamonds. Extending beyond the confines of the frame with their engaging impact, suffusing the parameters of the physical screen with the decadence of another era now reanimated, these images and their near-tactile expressivity demonstrate that the true sensuality of Norma's *scène d'amour* lies in the filmic form itself.



New Year's Eve.

Vaguely aware that Joe might be immune to her wiles, Norma remarks, “You think this is all very funny”; to which Joe replies, “A little.” But the cut to a bird’s-eye shot of the room immediately after this exchange, with its immediate evocation of the position of Joe’s hovering body at the beginning of the film, reveals the seriousness of his predicament. Capturing Norma and Joe as they dance on the floor below, the distance of the shot eradicates any sense of the latter’s individual identity; he is simply Norma’s co-star in a production borne of her insidious performance time. While the unlikely couple move across the gleaming, mirror-like tiles, bounded only by an orchestra playing melodies of yesteryear and the numerous photographs of Norma’s youth, they seem to defy the demands of gravity and time itself – much as Joe does in the fateful swimming pool. The time of the scene is 10,000 midnights ago and on the eve of a new year; it takes place in a haunted house and on the contours of a sensationally-charged movie screen. In the

performance time of *Sunset Boulevard*, this is both a moment in Norma's reawakening and the prelude to Joe's death.

Though Joe plays a minimal role in Norma's return to Paramount Studios – the longed-for, Edenic space of her performance time – his presence nonetheless manifests itself in the overhead shot that frames Norma as a crowd of well-wishers surround her. Seated in a director's chair at the periphery of her one-time collaborator Cecil B. DeMille's set, exasperated by the presence of the recording microphones, Norma remains unnoticed until a lighting technician turns a spotlight to "get a good look at" her. Gradually, a crowd of extras and studio workers almost envelop Norma as they pay homage to her, a tableau of homecoming caught by the bird's-eye shot. With the light shining down on Norma, the image at first seems like the realization of the star's dreams: Once having to force herself into the light cast by the projection of her silent films, Norma now finds that glow willingly trained upon her with the promise of a future on-screen.

But as the shot endures, the nearly beatific radiance that highlighted Norma's face seems to bleach it beyond recognition; like an overexposed piece of film, her image is on the verge of fading into nothingness, offering only the suggestion of a figure. In this way, there is here a brief disjunction between Norma and Swanson herself, as the former's ghostly persona seems to supersede the anchoring corporeality of the actress who embodies her. (The shot is, in fact, an

uncanny manifestation of Swanson's future contention in her memoirs that Norma was "a huge specter in the spotlight" with her (259) after the success of *Sunset Boulevard*.) If the New Year's Eve shot offers a glimpse into Joe's future, then this moment presages the fade-out that concludes *Sunset Boulevard* itself – Norma Desmond's final destructive union with the filmic body she so fanatically desires.

With its shift from rapture to ruin in seconds, the shot discloses Norma's actual significance to the crowd: She is herself a recollection-object, a vestige from another time that has made her way into the present and, in so doing, renders the utterly contemporary movie-set an uncanny setting for her troubled performance time. As one of the studio workers remarks upon hearing of Norma's arrival, "Why, I thought she was dead!" But Norma is, as Fischer comments, "*technically* alive" (emphasis mine; 168); and with her presence on the set comes the question of what Marks calls "unresolved traumas" (80) – unresolved, of course, for the woman who has never accepted the end of her era. By contrast, DeMille's appearance in an extended cameo bespeaks authority and commitment to the Hollywood of the present moment, an acceptance of and contribution to the performance time of modern-day filmmaking ("pictures have changed quite a bit") that liberates him from membership in Norma's pantheon of waxworks. Though the playing-out of the extra-diegetic level allows Swanson and DeMille themselves to reunite in a film constructed through the very

technological means that so disrupted Norma's career, the character finds no such poetic resolution. From the nexus of perspective between Wilder's camera and Joe's gaze, Gloria Swanson is DeMille's peer, while Norma Desmond is a recollection-object whose uneasy reawakening of the past leads DeMille to command, "Turn that light back where it belongs."

Norma: I am big. It's the pictures that got small.

At the beginning of *Sunset Boulevard*, when speaking to Joe about her script, Norma rejects his attempts to edit any of her scenes: "Cut away from *me*?...They want to see me, *me* – Norma Desmond!" As the final third of the film unfolds, Norma's blind certitude of her own greatness and the imminence of her return enables her to perceive her reception at Paramount Studios as the validation of her earlier declaration. Eager to be ready when her fans finally do "see her" again, Norma begins a series of beauty treatments that represent a frantic externalization of her narcissistic drive, a compulsive need to, as Wexman describes it, "recreate her body into a form commensurate with her glamorous image of herself" (155). Joe had once remarked in voice-over that "it wasn't easy getting coherence into those wild hallucinations of hers" as he revised Norma's screenplay; and in a poignant corporeal variation on this observation, Norma herself seeks to find physical coherence in the ordering of her body according to her obsession with her ideal *imago*.

This tension between physical facticity and ethereal illusion becomes especially heightened as the narrative draws to a close. Indeed, the conclusion of the film represents less a denouement than a quickening of the entangled identities trapped within the spatio-temporal parameters of a dark performance time: Norma desperately reclaiming her youth as she maneuvers her way back from the isolation of her mansion to the glory of the studio and, as Joe says, “those cameras that would never turn”; and Joe, who lives a dual life as Norma’s lover on Sunset Boulevard and the sweetheart of fellow writer Betty Schaeffer (Nancy Olson), with whom he surreptitiously spends his evenings at Paramount working on a script. A young girl content to remain behind-the-scenes instead of in front of the camera, Betty and her straightforward charm – defeating Norma’s tortured romantic machinations in its very simplicity – seduce Joe utterly: “May I say that you smell real special?...[L]ike freshly-laundered linen handkerchiefs, like a brand-new automobile.” Where Norma’s body stands as a recollection-object, Betty’s holds the promise of the present and the future.

In his belief that Betty is worthy of more than he can give her, however, a noble Joe attempts to discourage her attachment by cavalierly disclosing the truth about his relationship with Norma. Finally attempting to escape from what he describes as the “peculiar prison” of his existential situation, Joe packs his bags and exits Norma’s house. Determined to leave the performance time of

Hollywood and Norma herself behind, Joe almost frees himself – until Norma shoots him in the back, infuriated by his resistance to her egomaniacal will, his refusal to follow the dictates of her fantastic vision. The murder takes place in long shot, as the camera follows Joe while Norma, off-screen, calls after him and then shoots him three times. In speaking of William Holden, Wilder has said that “physically, he was first-class” (in Crowe 240); and the trademark eloquence of his physicality reveals itself emphatically as Joe/Holden struggles at the side of the pool. There is a moment of wrenching suspension as the momentum of the film seems to concentrate itself entirely on his fight for life at the abyss of death, only to conclude with the fall into the water that the audience already knew was inevitable. Norma has in fact fulfilled the prophecy she made only moments before: “No one ever leaves a star.”

As the film concludes, however, Norma herself is equally trapped within the time-space of her own making. While newspaper reporters and policemen crowd in her bedroom following the murder, a completely delusional Norma ignores their questioning and keeps her eyes fixed on her reflection in a mirror, now seeking immersion in that original, narcissistic sanctuary from reality. In the final words of his voice-over, Joe sets forth that “the dream [Norma] had clung to so desperately had enfolded her”; and as Norma descends the staircase of her home, believing herself to be on the set of a DeMille movie, it seems that her dream ultimately enfolds the audience, as

well. With this definitive spatial and temporal integration of those various motifs that comprised the film – the mansion and studio, the past and the present – the chronotope of the film finds its fullest, and most sinister, realization. After speaking directly to a news camera about how happy she is to be back at work, Norma makes her famous proclamation, “All right, Mr. DeMille, I’m ready for my close-up,” and moves progressively closer to the lens until the shot becomes indistinct and, finally, dissolves.

Lawrence has described Norma as the “embodiment” of Mary Ann Doane’s concept of the female spectator’s “overinvestment” in the cinematic image (157 – 158), with both character and theoretical subjectivity sharing a consuming desire to enter into the world of the film. Certainly this last shot fulfills the promise of hyper-proximity made in the *Queen Kelly* scene; but more than signifying the craving for ideality borne by the Doanian female subjectivity, Norma’s relationship to the filmic body finds itself on a visceral need for its animating life force. Neither goddess nor mortal throughout the movie, Norma is nonetheless wholly at peace in these last moments, merged with the greater filmic entity as her corporeal self becomes one with her longed-for cinematic reflection. Yet in a final twist of the pathos that shadows Norma, her triumphant union with the body of the film is one that only unsettles the audience, those “wonderful people out there in the dark” who are now oppressed by the diffusion of Norma’s image across the screen. If earlier scenes in *Sunset*

Boulevard inspired the spectator's haptic appreciation of the sensory potential inherent within cinematic performance time, then this last shot heightens that sensibility with an eerie provocation of empathy with Joe's own fateful limbo.



Norma's close-up.

Moving from the stark, almost clinical modernism of the news cameras and surrounding reporters to the otherworldliness of Norma's cinematic union, this final scene presents a fitting coda to the coexistence of materiality and ephemerality established in the title and opening sequences. With these tableaux of spatial and temporal registers in flux, *Sunset Boulevard* frames its emblematic rendering of the chronotope of 1950s Hollywood: a "movie about movies" that recounts the disenfranchising historical transition from silent to talkie through a narrative and filmic body that invite the viewer into an equally amorphous realm. Even as the audience already knows that Joe will end his life in Norma's swimming pool, the sensorial and emotional depth of the film seduces the spectator into not only suspending that awareness, but also engaging with the

hope – not unlike Joe and Norma themselves, perhaps – that the ending will be different. For regardless of their tragic finale, within that performance time uniting past and present, natural and supernatural, Joe and Norma live again.

III.

Re-visioning Time in *All About Eve*

Early in *All About Eve*, Bill Sampson (Gary Merrill), the temperamental director with whom Margo Channing is in love, decries the elitism of the Broadway culture:

What book of rules says “the theatre” exists only within some ugly buildings crowded into one square mile of New York City?...Wherever there’s magic, and make-believe, and an audience, there’s theatre.

As the film progresses, Bill’s words prove true. In a narrative comprised of intrigues and masquerades, betrayals and strivings, the off-stage reality inhabited by Margo and Eve rivals the drama of any on-stage production. Whether through Margo’s self-involved, commanding persona or Eve’s Machiavellian charade of sincerity, the various locales of Mankiewicz’s movie – theatres, apartments, and dressing rooms – lose their quotidian significance and transform instead into dimensions structured by the chronotope of performance time, filled with dark magic, make-believe, and an audience of friends and lovers. Ultimately, these milieux shift into the sites within which Margo and Eve, each struggling to redefine and seize their respective ideal identities, act out their divergent roles as both actresses and women. Structured by a flashback guided in voice-

over from the tripartite perspective of theatre critic Addison DeWitt (played by the inimitable George Sanders), Karen Richards, and briefly Margo herself, the relationship of time and space in *All About Eve* demonstrates that the world of performance not only extends beyond Broadway, but may also become inescapable.

Maureen Turim has commented upon “the aura of inevitability” (*Flashbacks* 170) that surrounds the action of flashback films,⁶⁰ and Mankiewicz’s movie ostensibly offers the spectator a diegetic universe dominated by this sense of the fated. Yet even with the film’s departure from the present to recount the past, the awards ceremony in Eve’s honor that frames the diegesis presents her stardom less as a predetermined *fait accompli* than an evolving situation, one propelled into the living moment by the momentum of what came before. As Mankiewicz himself noted, flashbacks allow the viewer to perceive “not only the effects of the past upon the present, but also the degree to which the past *exists* in the present” (in Kozloff 71). In his extensive analysis of Mankiewicz’s flashback technique, Deleuze remarks that the recollection-image (the image that makes memory visually manifest) “represents the former present that the past was” (*Cinema II* 54); by extension, then, Eve’s success in the present appears as a happening already in the process of becoming memory, a “former present” that leads only to the next state of being for this performing woman.

⁶⁰ In the passage from which this quote is taken, Turim’s discussion relates specifically to *film noir*.

This temporal fluidity affects more than the narrative structure of the film, however. Indeed, it is embodied in the leading actresses themselves as they give human form to the intertwining of past and present: Bette Davis, an established star already in the process of becoming a legend; and Anne Baxter, an ingénue taking part in the production that would be the highlight of her career. With Davis bearing in her very presence the history of her previous roles, and Baxter's relatively unformed persona seeking definition with the unreeling of the film, both actresses broaden the dimensions of time and space represented within the performance time of *All About Eve* to include their own respective former-presents and future potential.

At the beginning of the film, the audience learns that Margo Channing has been starring in a play called *Aged in Wood*, an antebellum drama with Margo portraying a Southern belle. For the remainder of the movie, posters of the play featuring a caricature of Margo in full hoop-skirt regalia hang in the background, and Margo herself even appears in costume in brief shots of a curtain call. Yet shadowing this fictional role for a fictional actress is the fact of Davis's own performance as a Southern heroine in William Wyler's *Jezebel* (1938), for which she won an Academy Award. This allusion to Davis's early career imbues her presence in the film with a reflexive awareness of both the fantasies she enacted on-screen and the extra-diegetic reality of her professional life as, like Margo, a working actor. Highlighting this intersection between dramatic

illusion and the construction thereof is the backstage sequence following the curtain call, in which Margo unceremoniously sheds the guise of her on-stage role and proceeds to immerse herself in the present tense of off-stage reality.



Henry Fonda and Davis in *Jezebel* Baxter and Davis in *All About Eve*

Though arguably the most iconic of Davis's incarnations, Margo Channing is only one of an entire *oeuvre*: the amoral Mildred in *Of Human Bondage* (John Cromwell, 1934); courageous society girl in *Dark Victory* (Edmund Goulding, 1939); and the beautifully transformed Charlotte Vale in *Now, Voyager* (Irving Rapper, 1942), among many others. She also enjoyed a three-film creative alliance with Wyler, starring in *The Letter* (1940) and *The Little Foxes* (1941) as well as *Jezebel*. Though the 1940s represented the height of Davis's commercial and critical popularity, she nonetheless continued to work up until her death in 1989, starring with Olivia de Havilland in *Hush...Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (Robert Aldrich, 1964) and Lillian Gish in *The Whales of August* (Lindsay Anderson, 1987). In contrast to the more maudlin histrionics of rival (and eventual co-star in Aldrich's 1962 movie *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*)

Joan Crawford, Davis's immediately recognizable screen persona manages to complement rather than overwhelm the remarkable range of characters she created.

Davis's screen presence is, of course, famously idiosyncratic. Known for the intensity of expression in her large eyes; the quick, vivid movements of her hands and body; and the smoky, often strident, timbre of her voice, Davis projects a wholly kinetic energy that brings to each of her roles – from romantic to conniving, forlorn to regal – a kind of driven intentionality. Martin Shingler describes her as “an actress in motion,” conveying the emotions of her character through “a systematic orchestration” of her eyes, shoulders, and torso (47); Davis herself remarked, “[O]ne acts with the complete body” (in Shingler 50). Davis conveys, then, a sense of relentless motion, a complete resistance to stasis whether in the glance of her eyes or the smoking of a cigarette.⁶¹ Where the magnetism of Rita Hayworth's animation, for example, inspires a more transcendent unity between the lived bodies of star, film, and spectator, Davis's corporeal force manages to anchor the focus of the frame to her own restless motility.

Counterbalancing this restlessness is the relatively innocuous nature of Anne Baxter's on-screen presence, a subdued demeanor that allows the actress to blend with the environment of the frame rather than dominate it. Truly, Baxter's most distinctive quality lies

⁶¹ With the notable exception of Davis's brilliant static pose in *The Little Foxes*, when her character refuses to save the life of her dying husband.

not in any visual impact wrought by her pleasantly pretty face, but in the aural dimensionality granted by her husky, unexpectedly seductive voice. Certainly the role of Eve calls for the quiet, calculating strength so well conveyed by Baxter; yet even in movies as disparate as Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), Western *Yellow Sky* (William Wellman, 1948), and Hitchcock drama *I Confess* (1953), she consistently presents a restrained acting style that favors the development of a character over the formation of a star persona. Though *All About Eve* captures Baxter's most famous and arguably finest performance, her Academy Award-winning portrayal of an alcoholic socialite in *The Razor's Edge* (Edmund Goulding, 1946) rivals her work in Mankiewicz's film for nuance and elegance. Moving from naiveté to desolation, Baxter brings an undercurrent of unqualified, almost visceral tragedy to the opulence of the prestige production. Ultimately, Baxter represents a shift from the surface appeal of the stereotypical studio-era contract player towards a more Method-esque introspective approach to role and personality.⁶²

In the co-starring of Davis – an absolute star whom the audience immediately recognizes as such – and Baxter – a subtler actress who courts rather than demands the attention of the spectator – the film reflects on the extra-diegetic level the conjunction of icon and ingénue formed within the narrative. Yet even beyond this extra-

⁶² See Richard Dyer's discussion of Method film-acting in *The Stars* 141 – 142.

and intra-diegetic parallel, the dual presences represent the corporeal counterparts to the performance time of *All About Eve*: each woman captured in a space of pure creation, suffusing the present with the shadow of the past and the yet-to-be-determined promise of the future.

Addison: In time, [Eve] will be what you are.

In *The Stars*, Morin remarks that “the star belongs altogether to her public...Like kings, like gods, the star belongs even more to her admirers than they belong to her” (46). Though still an idol, the star requires that vivifying force of the spectator’s projection-identification to remain the sublime entity in the realm of the screen. What Morin understands as a *de rigueur* obligation in the divine rule of the star, however, shifts into an altogether more sinister mode of possession in *All About Eve*. Introduced to Margo as her most ardent fan, Eve masks her ruthless intent with the appearance of unconditional appreciation. Bill, ascribing to Eve a kind of ingenuous narcissism, describes her as a “dreamy-eyed kid” who is simply “trying in every way to be as much like her ideal as possible”; Margo’s more perceptive housekeeper (played by Thelma Ritter) observes the almost mechanical processes at work in Eve’s relationship to the star. “She’s studying you like...a set of blueprints,” Birdie explains, “How you walk, talk, eat, think, sleep.” Under Eve’s gaze, Margo indeed “belongs altogether” – as both a professional persona and embodied figure – to the young woman.

A sequence taking place after one of Margo's performances in *Aged in Wood* illustrates Eve's covetousness. After Eve leaves the dressing room to store Margo's costume, the actress follows her backstage seconds later. Standing in the foreground of a long-shot with her back to the camera, a surprised Margo sees Eve standing in the background before a mirror, holding the dress up and bowing deeply to her reflection. There is a ghostly quality to the image, taking place in silence within an all-but deserted backstage, with a glimpse of the empty theatre seats visible in the background. Eve herself seems nearly weightless in her reverie, absorbed within her more ephemeral, reflected self and unaware of Margo's stolid form. The spell is broken only when Margo calls to Eve and startles her from her surreptitious self-admiration.

Deleuze has described Mankiewicz's use of the flashback as allowing the spectator to "witness the birth of memory" (*Cinema II* 52), to experience the inception and duration of an event that would, in part, form the foundation of the present. Certainly this backstage interlude offers just such a revelation, with Margo gazing upon the birth of not only a memory, but the star that Eve herself will become – in this way rendering the latter's reflection not a wished-for imagining but a vision of the inevitable. As Eve graciously accepts the Sarah Siddons Award at the start and end of the film, the audience finally glimpses what she herself saw within the mirror. Several sequences later, after Eve has been made understudy to an

unknowing Margo, Addison informs the latter that “in time, [Eve] will be what you are”; and after witnessing the “birth” of Eve in her insidious performance time, both Margo and the audience already know the truth in Addison’s prophecy.

Jackie Stacey has described Eve’s evolution as one that “narrativise[s] a traditional pleasure of female spectatorship” (“Desperately” 459), with its diegetic recounting of a fan who becomes a star. Complicating Eve’s calculated ascension to the heights of Margo’s stardom, however, is the fact that Margo herself no longer desires to be “what she is.” In the opening voice-over that introduces the characters, Addison describes Margo as “a great star, a true star. She never was or will be anything less or anything else.” Yet as the narrative proceeds, it reveals Margo’s fear that, in fact, she “never will be anything else” aside from a great actress; or, as she describes it, “Something spelled out in light bulbs...[or] something called a ‘temperament.’” Even as Eve seeks to appropriate the creative artistry, professional status, and personal relationships of her idol, Margo’s own dissatisfaction – and her eventual happiness – with these aspects of her life renders Eve’s trajectory of usurpation a hollow pursuit.

Margo discloses the depth of her discontent in a monologue in the middle of the film. Seated with Karen in a car on a country road, stalled in the winter snow on her way back to New York for a performance, Margo abandons the bravado of her theatrical persona

and speaks candidly about her fear that she will never be able to reconcile her idealized self and the real individual she longs to be for Bill:

Funny business, a woman's career. The things you drop on your way up the ladder so you can move faster; you forget you'll need them again when you get back to being a woman.

As Margo speaks these revelatory words, high-contrast lighting illuminates her face and underscores the dusky visual texture of her hair and dark fur coat. Margo/Davis looks undeniably glamorous swathed in the coat, holding a cigarette in her gloved hand. Yet these accoutrements appear in the tableau of the shot less as symbols of intra- and extra-diegetic stardom than velvety shades meant to further enclose her – and the spectator – within the intimacy of the medium close-up. Complementing Margo's emotional musings, the material richness of the image inspires the sense of co-presence between film and viewer described by Marks. In contrast to the sweeping, externalized attention to the self that typifies Margo's "temperament" as a leading lady, this scene offers a moment of introspective reflection that is lulling in its quiet poignancy. If the physical locale of the sequence is an expanse between country and city (an undefined vista glimpsed in the background through the rear

windshield), then its psychological space is Margo's threshold between narcissism and a self-less attachment.⁶³



Margo: "...back to being a woman."

Yet Margo cannot truly escape the coordinates of performance time: At the end of the monologue, Margo counters her emotional tone with a wry, "Slow curtain. The end." Sardonic humor aside, this scene in the car does in truth conclude an interlude of introspection that begins for Margo several scenes earlier, in the party sequence of the film. Accurately predicting a "bumpy night," a drunken Margo finds herself caught in a clash between performativity and self-revelation from which the almost mournful quality of her monologue finally emerges. In an angry observation at the party, Karen remarks that "it's about time Margo realized that what's attractive onstage need not necessarily be attractive off"; but Margo, frustrated by the imbalance between her identities as ideal star and real woman, does not know how to differentiate between the on- and off-stage dimensions.

⁶³ This monologue recalls an earlier role of Davis's as a frivolous socialite in *Mr. Skeffington* (Vincent Sherman, 1944), who ultimately learns that "a woman is beautiful when she is loved."

The most famous moment in the party sequence takes place when Margo stalks up a staircase, turns to her guests, and declares, “Fasten your seatbelts. It’s going to be a bumpy night.” In his analysis of Davis-as-Channing in *Star Acting*, Charles Affron describes her “complete possession of space” in this shot, bringing to the image a “harmony of physique, environment, rhetoric, and situation” (305). This alignment reaches its apex, however, on another set of stairs at the conclusion of the sequence. Suspicious of Eve and jealous of Bill’s affection for her, Margo drunkenly confronts her friends as they sit on the stairs leading from the foyer to her bedroom. Following Karen’s above remark, there is a cut to a medium close-up of Margo, who turns and clambers past the seated guests with the camera panning upwards and to the left to follow her path in medium shot. As “Stormy Weather” plays in the background, Margo reaches the top of the stairs and surveys her guests, summoning her dignity for a final insult to Eve before exiting.

As ever with Mankiewicz’ dialogue, the words exchanged between Margo and her guests in this scene are drolly insightful; yet the affect of the sequence derives itself from the resonating physical energy of Davis’s presence. Though *All About Eve* is considered a masterpiece of cerebral cinema, the moment in which Margo climbs the stairs appeals to the more visceral intelligence of the spectator: the rustling and wrinkling of Margo’s black satin dress; her hair falling in her face; the sound of her footsteps; and her purposeful

shoving past those seated on the stairs provide a union of “physique and environment” that grounds the “rhetoric and situation.” With this evocation of the “bodily relationship between the viewer and the image” (164) of which Marks writes, it is a purely sensorial empathy that guides the spectator’s awareness of the exquisite pathos radiating from Margo’s dejected figure, trapped as she is between her stage persona and her emotional reality. Stranded on the staircase, Margo’s corporeal displacement both anticipates and makes manifest her subsequent recognition of “the things you drop on your way up the ladder...you forget you’ll need them again when you get back to being a woman.”

Affron maintains that at this point in the film, Margo/Davis “will never be more herself...[an] actress-woman on an appropriated stage” (310). But rather than represent a triumph, this coda typifies the fraught performance time in which Margo exists – the physical and psychological quandary, that is, in which Margo must be on stage in her own home, playing a self-obsessed diva instead of revealing her insecurities to the man she loves. Later, in the car scene, Margo admits, “I want [Bill] to want me – but *me*, not ‘Margo Channing.’ And if I can’t tell them apart, how can he?” Unlike Norma Desmond, who seeks refuge in a Morinian mythico-reality wrought by the hybridity of movie star and goddess, Margo longs for a discrete identity that belongs not to the public, but to she herself.

Eve: It got so that I couldn’t tell the real from the unreal, except that the unreal seemed more real to me...

Where the dynamic expressivity of Margo/Davis's corporeality inspires a kind of sensory empathy between the viewer and the image, the narrative calls for Eve/Baxter to cultivate an entirely different appeal in her presence. Appearing wraith-like in the backstage sequence in which she bows to her own reflection, Eve maintains this suspension from earthly physicality in her noiseless attendance to and anticipation of Margo's needs. An annoyingly naïve Lloyd Richards (Hugh Marlowe) describes Eve's demeanor as a "quiet graciousness"; a wiser Margo comments dryly to Eve, "It seems that I can't think of a thing you haven't thought of." Truly, Eve seems to have the gift of foresight: On her first evening as Margo's assistant, she manages to materialize at the star's side just in time to interrupt a romantic moment between her and Bill. Deleuze has noted that "Mankiewicz's characters never develop in a linear evolution" (49) – it is fitting, then, that on the physical plane Eve's actions generate not immediate causes-and-effects but rather the permeation of time and space.

The representation of the performance time in which Eve resides underscores the almost supernatural quality of her character. Throughout two extended medium close-ups, Eve holds the camera as rapt as the people to whom she is speaking. The first takes place on the night that Eve meets Margo, Karen, and the rest of the coterie. She sits in Margo's dressing room, what Affron describes as "a nether land between stage and life" (298), and begins to recount how

she came to spend her evenings waiting at the stage door.

Transforming the off-stage intimacy of Margo's chamber into her personal theatre, Eve weaves a tale of childhood dreams, love, and loss within a close-up that further emphasizes her role as the star of this subdued spectacle. As she speaks, the theatre professionals she claims to revere have now become her audience – a fact emphasized in a medium shot that shows the back of their heads as they sit listening to Eve. Highlighting this glorious isolation is the music that will become her theme in the film; a wistful melody that, like Eve herself, is uneasily seductive in its very sweetness.

Both interrupting and shifting the flow of the present with her personal flashback, Eve crafts a past that is eventually proven to be a lie – a twist that adds what Turim calls a “level of self-reference” (135) to the flashback structure of *All About Eve* itself. Yet more than contributing “a tinge of irony” (ibid) to the film, as Turim writes, the fact that Eve's narrative is a fictional one serves to further enhance the interweaving of possibility and actuality, fantasy and reality that characterizes the performance time of Mankiewicz's movie. In *Cinema II*, Deleuze writes of the director's use of “forking time” (49) within the flashback, his construction of the various directions in which a given point in the narrative might have shifted. At this turning point in the time-space of the film, the various players (however unknowingly) encounter the possible directions from which they must determine their personal progression: Margo, Karen,

and the rest of the “audience” – with the exception of Margo’s assistant – opt to believe Eve’s story, with unfortunate consequences; while Eve herself commits to an entirely alternative reality. Eve’s former present never existed; she is shaping both her own future and that of her listeners with a mistruth. But Eve’s deceit lacks the banality of an ordinary lie. She is, rather, actively constructing an alternate existential situation that, in the spirit of performance time, *could have been* true.

With this in mind, Eve’s second monologue later in the film functions as a commentary on her *tour de force* in Margo’s dressing room, an aria-esque musing upon the narcissistic need for approval that drives her as both an actress and an individual. Seated on the staircase with Bill and Addison at Margo’s party – claiming that site as a performance space even before Margo – Eve quietly but emphatically contradicts Bill’s remark that those in the theatre “give so much for almost always so little.”

Why, if there’s nothing else, there’s applause...It’s like waves of love coming over the footlights, wrapping you up. Imagine, to know that every night different hundreds of people love you...They want you; you belong. Just that alone is worth anything.

Compared to Margo’s space of self-revelation in the car scene, Eve’s medium close-up seems bare – dressed plainly with a simple string of pearls, she leans back against a blank wall, her comely face lacking Margo/Davis’s flair. Yet for all its starkness, the image bears a curiously abstract elegance: Eve’s head tilts slightly to the left, while

Bill's tuxedoed arm and knee form an angular black mass to the upper right. Most striking is the almost silvery sheen to the wall on which she leans, providing a backdrop resembling a movie screen that is pristine but for an unexpected grey smudge to the right of Eve's face. Moreover, Eve's eyes, both searching for and gazing at a vision the audience cannot perceive, seem to expand the parameters of the shot. Observing her future glory as surely as she envisaged her fantastic former present in the dressing-room sequence, Eve once again imbues the materiality of her surroundings with the conditionality of her existence; a life that finds meaning, that is, only in its relationship to performance. Where Margo/Davis calls for the immediacy of the Marksian co-presence between film and audience, Eve/Baxter is a figure of deferral – continually beckoning the spectator to follow her drifting between the could-have-been and the will-be.



"They want you, you belong."

Altogether, the shot projects an oneiric quality, a surreality borne of the union between *mise en scène* and the tones of Eve/Baxter's voice as she rhapsodizes on the transcendent power of performance. To be wanted, to belong – the dreams of a young woman who longs to create an ideal self as desperately as Margo wishes to escape from her own. Through these two close-ups, the audience witnesses Eve's transformation from spectator to star; her evolution, in terms of the Morinian paradigm, from the adoring fan who projects "love's magic" onto the figure of her idol to an actress who articulates her need to "focus... [that] magic on" herself (*The Stars* 30). Recalling Deleuze's contention that Mankiewicz constructs time not in a linear fashion but in fragments that offer glimpses of "an inexplicable secret" (49), both of these shots briefly reveal Eve herself to be what Addison later calls an "improbable person": an entity given life by a romanticized past that could have been, and driven by a desire as eternal as the myth of Narcissus itself.

In the next scene, after Addison has witnessed Eve's reading of Margo's part, he enthusiastically describes it as "something made of music and fire." Where the above moments in the film support this understanding of Eve as a channel for the ineffable elements that comprise an inspired performer, Margo remains grounded both in her insecurities and her unemotional professionalism. (When Addison likens Eve to Margo, the latter replies, "That's me – an old kazoo with some sparklers.") Beyond the distinction between youth and

middle age that divides Eve and Margo, then, there is the greater question of gravity: the struggle of a conflicted body and mind that characterizes Margo's desperation to commit to off-stage reality, versus the serene weightlessness of the dream-like close-ups in which Eve weaves her pursuit of a metaphysical existence on-stage (seeking, as she says, the "waves of love" that transcend the mechanical reality of the footlights). In the sequence in which Addison uncovers Eve's true story, however, she finds herself no longer suspended within the safety of her "inexplicable secret" but trapped within a prison formed by both Addison's knowledge and her own lies.

Though Eve proves herself to be capable of blackmail and adultery – and, by her own admission, anything else: "I'd do a lot more for a part that good" – she encounters her superior in the form of Addison. Urbane and amoral, amused by his peers' dislike of him, Addison proves himself to be, like Eve herself, an "improbable person." In her hotel room on the afternoon of her debut in a Broadway-bound play, Eve attempts to deceive Addison with a tale of a romance with playwright Lloyd, only to discover the critic's contempt for her siren-like wiles. He proceeds to list the facts of Eve's life, disclosing the tawdry actualities of a former present that she had tried to reinvent. Shutting the door and forbidding Eve to telephone for help, Addison isolates her within the claustrophobic

dimensions of a hotel room as oppressive as the revelations themselves.

With the exposure of this hidden life comes the deterioration of Eve herself. As the scene evolves from a guarded dialogue to a battle – “killer to killer,” as Addison describes it – Eve’s own demeanor and physique gradually become virtually unrecognizable. Her voice shifts from its cultured tones of “quiet graciousness” to a coarse belligerence; and the composure with which she held herself throughout the film degenerates into a spastic agitation as she throws herself onto the bed, sobbing and pounding her fists. If Eve’s close-up at the party offered a cameo-like rendering of the ideal self she longs to be, her appearance in medium shot on the bed seems an almost grotesque variation on that otherworldliness. With eye make-up smeared, her hair in disarray, Eve’s façade is in the process of disintegrating – as though her image has assumed, in fact, the grime of the smudge that marred her otherwise immaculate close-up on the stairs. Ultimately, Eve cedes to the gravity she has eluded throughout the film: By the end of the scene, her body appears less like that of a woman than a wounded feral creature. And yet, as Eve struggles to lift herself up on her arms, she reveals that her wholly predatory instinct remains intact.



Eve's disintegration.

In his exhaustive history of the making of *All About Eve*, Sam Staggs interprets this scene between Eve and Addison as expressive of a sado-masochistic relationship (108) between the two. There is, certainly, a controlled viciousness to Addison's entrapment of Eve, towering over her wretched form on the bed. The sensory impact of the sequence, however, finds itself not in carnal desire but a visceral struggle, "killer to killer": one desperately trying to guard the "inexplicable secret" of which Deleuze wrote, the other wrenching it away. Pausing the empirical progression of time in that anonymous hotel room, revealing Eve's very self to be only the construct of an insidious performance, Addison lays claim to her past, present, and future with his knowledge. Instead of belonging to those ethereal "waves of love" radiated by an audience, the once-otherworldly Eve now finds herself caught in a nightmare of possession. Addison is the keeper of her secret.

Addison: You all know all about Eve.

With this sequence comes the conclusion of the flashback series, and the film returns to the present moment in which Eve accepts her award for achievement in the theatre. This return signals, moreover, the conclusion of Eve's performance time and the beginning of another's. Returning home after the ceremony, Eve finds a young girl in her living room – a devoted fan named Phoebe (Barbara Bates) who expresses her admiration of Eve in worshipful language reminiscent of that once used by the actress herself. Appropriately, then, Eve's first glimpse of Phoebe calls to mind the formerly supernatural quality of her physicality: While making herself a drink, Eve looks into a mirror hanging above the bar and, shocked, sees Phoebe's sleeping form. Though Phoebe proceeds to explain herself, her indeterminate identity ("I *call* myself Phoebe," she later retorts to a quizzical Addison) requires no clarification. She is, as her first appearance asserts, simply Eve's reflection; one that allows the present incarnation of Eve Harrington to meet her former self.



"I *call* myself Phoebe."

At the conclusion of the scene, when Addison knocks at the door with Eve's award, Phoebe takes it to the bedroom and stands before a three-way mirror holding the prize. *All About Eve* ends with this image of Phoebe, bowing to and graciously acknowledging her infinitely reflected selves. Cheryl Bray Lower and R. Barton Palmer interpret the shot as not only making manifest Phoebe's narcissistic drive but also addressing the "disruption of the dialectic between performer and spectator" that has guided the film itself (134, 131). Yet rather than merely "disrupt" the boundaries between star and spectator, the image presents the ultimate merging of these two entities. Abandoning any sense of distinction between even natural and supernatural, Phoebe and her reflections represent an almost mythical moment of ascension as the real unites with the ideal – the next Narcissus becomes one with her reflection.

This otherworldly affect lies in the stunning "look" of the image. The shot is crystalline in the clarity and brightness of its

lighting, with sharp points of illumination radiating from the silvery sequined cloak that Phoebe has “borrowed” from Eve. Even Phoebe’s corporeal self in the foreground lacks the shade and substance of a human figure; it seems she is only the original reflection from which the others generate. Contrasting the earthy quality of Margo/Davis’s presence and surpassing even Eve’s seductive ethereality, the texture of this shot is all smoothness and luster – untraceable, lacking material “traction” for the haptic gaze. As a triumphant fanfare plays on the score, the film concludes with the “birth” of a final memory: the pivotal inception of what-will-be for both Phoebe and Eve. And yet it also bears witness to what-has-been, reanimating a moment that the audience recognizes from Eve’s disjointed journey to precarious greatness. Phoebe may represent a cipher, a vague successor to Eve, but what anchors this shot of shimmering timelessness is the weight, the burden, of the audience’s knowledge – an audience that knows all about Eves.

In its literally shining evocation of the intersection between fan and star, reality and ideality in a realm outside of time, this last image is the most visually striking of the entire film. Abandoning the brilliant dialogue that suffuses the aural dimension of the rest of the movie, here Mankiewicz designs a performance time that speaks for itself. The luminosity of this shot, however, finds an antecedent within the film itself – not through a particular trick of lighting, but in the figure of then-starlet Marilyn Monroe. Cast as Miss Caswell, a

graduate of the Copacabana School of Dramatic Art escorted by Addison, she is the anti-Eve: a glamour girl of style without substance whom Addison soon decides should be exiled from the theatre into the new, bourgeois medium of television. Monroe appears in only two scenes, the most notable of which is the party sequence. Here, Miss Caswell/Monroe drifts through Margo's soirée in a silver gown that presages Phoebe's borrowed robes; blonde and pale, she is a practically iridescent entity. Yet where the narrative calls for Miss Caswell to exist in the film only as a breath of frivolity within the tension of the drama, Monroe herself brings to her scenes a profound corporeal illumination that draws the eye to her and belies the incidental quality of her diegetic character.



Eve, Margo, and Miss Caswell.

This magnetism finds its quintessential expression in the moments before Margo's drunken exit from the party. Seated on the stairs with Karen, Bill, and Addison, Miss Caswell has only a few lines; but the affect of Monroe's presence lies in a moment in which Eve/Baxter and Margo/Davis face each other in the foreground.

Between them in the background, Miss Caswell/Monroe observes the unfolding scene. Though Monroe is only glimpsed in the shot, what would be known as her legendary “flesh impact” reveals itself nonetheless as an expanse of shadow-less white that counters the relative darkness of the other women’s skin and costuming. An inadvertent performance time generates itself here within the parameters of the three actress’s bodies, as yet another “birth of a memory” takes place. Through the retrospective gaze of the contemporary viewer, this dynastic triad comprises Hollywood’s present in young actress Baxter, its history in the legendary Davis, and the future in the as-yet not fully realized form of Marilyn Monroe. Perceived in this, the thematic and visual predecessor to the last shot of *All About Eve*, Monroe reveals her future to be as incandescent as Phoebe’s moment outside of time.



The dynasty of performance time.

For the leading actresses in *All About Eve*, however, the immediate future offered an uncanny real-life variation on the concerns of the narrative. When the time came to submit her name

for an Academy Award nomination, Davis obviously entered into the “Best Actress” category; and, although advised to compete for the “Best Supporting Actress” Oscar, Baxter (understandably) insisted on being nominated along with Davis. That same year, Swanson was nominated for *Sunset Boulevard*, but all three women lost to Judy Holliday in *Born Yesterday* (George Cukor, 1950). In Hollywood lore, it is generally believed that had Baxter agreed to remain in the supporting actress category, both she and Davis would have won their respective Oscars instead of splitting the vote between them (Staggs 207). For a film that deals, in part, with the question of what could-have-been, it seems only fitting that the spectre of speculation should haunt its extra-diegetic history.

That having been said, there is no doubt as to the ultimate outcome of the interplay between Baxter and Davis.⁶⁴ Davis is now considered one of Hollywood’s greatest stars, while Baxter’s place in cultural consciousness is linked inextricably with Eve Harrington. For all of the depth and subtlety of her performance, Baxter would not go on to attain the phenomenal success of her diegetic counterpart or, indeed, her co-stars Davis and Monroe. Yet this regrettable caveat of film history seems to only emphasize *All About Eve*’s significance as a cinematic work capturing 1950s Hollywood itself as a time and space in transition. The creative moment may be,

⁶⁴ The actresses were, as it happens, close friends off the screen; and in an even more ironic twist, Baxter presented Davis with a Sarah Siddons Award in 1973 (Staggs 102, 167).

as Karen remarked, one that “flares up, burns hot, and then it’s gone”; but through film itself, that instant and its inherent possibilities are never truly lost.

IV.

Conclusion: Performance time unending

In his essay on “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” André Bazin famously describes photography as a medium that “embalms time,” preserving as it does a given moment for posterity (14). He goes on to remark that cinema exceeds even this achievement in its ability to capture the progression of time itself: “[T]he image of things is likewise the image of their duration, *change mummified* as it were” (emphasis mine; 15). Rather than simply offer an insulated instant fully-formed in its existence within a former present, film records the shifting between past, present, and future that defines the phenomenon of temporality. With this in mind, then, the fleeting registers of past and present and the spaces they suffuse in *Sunset Boulevard* and *All About Eve* remain ever in flux – and yet ever contained within the protective framework of film itself.

And so the chronotope of performance time offers more than, to recall Bakhtin’s statement, “the place where the knots of *narrative* are tied and untied” (emphasis mine; 250). Indeed, with its evocation and concretization of the myriad milieux inhabited by the star, performance time captures the extra-diegetic unraveling of a

Hollywood in transition as well as the intra-diegetic attempts to re-entwine the threads of its historicity. As depicted in Norma's mansion and Margo's apartment, the Paramount movie set and a Broadway dressing-room, the idyll of the idol is one whose coordinates extend beyond the narrative sequence-of-events to include the existential territory of Hollywood itself and, moreover, the sensual parameters of the cinematic screen. Further, through the identities of Norma, Margo, and Eve as respectively embodied by Swanson, Davis, and Baxter, the idol herself stands as a versatile entity moving fluidly between the registers of past success and present possibility.⁶⁵

The popularity of bio-pics of stars in the 1950s also revealed this intersection of pathos and potential incarnate, as the melodrama

⁶⁵ As a point of future analysis, it would be intriguing to further explore the limitations of narcissism as faced by the idols in performance time – or, more precisely, the limitations of the ideality in which they invest. For example, why at the conclusions of their respective films are Norma and Eve left to such sinister fates? As their narrative trajectories end, each represents, arguably, a failed narcissistic body: Norma overwhelming the filmic body in her agonizing, if crazed, obsession with a glorified past self; Eve's long-awaited success rendering her an iconic figure whose persona (talent, manner, even clothing) may be imitated – and eventually appropriated – by her own "Eve." Only Margo escapes from such an unhappy ending; for rather than a failed narcissistic body, she is a triumphant partner in a successful marriage (offering a more complex representation of the myth of romantic love set forth in *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year*).

To examine the point further, it could be argued that Norma and Eve give corporeal form to the limitations of ideality faced by the very studio-era Hollywood that gave rise to performance time. That is, the dissolution of Hollywood's system provoked both a recuperative chronotope and, at the same time, an implicit acknowledgement of the fragility of the once-infallible in the diegetic fates of the characters. Indeed, other performance-time films reveal a preoccupation with the vulnerability of the star's body: In *The Bad and the Beautiful*, actress Georgia Lorrison (Lana Turner) is an alcoholic; film sensation Maria Vargas (Ava Gardner) in *The Barefoot Contessa* is murdered by her jealous husband; and faded star Norman Maine (James Mason) commits suicide rather than allow his alcoholism to hinder wife Vicki Lester's (Judy Garland) success. Transposing the disenchantment of the era's close to the physical form of the star (both male and female, interestingly), performance time strikes a poignant balance between the revelation of frailty and the hope of rehabilitation.

of such films found a parallel in the extra-diegetic poignancy of the situation endured by the figures profiled therein. For those stars still alive – actors including Al Jolson, Buster Keaton, and George Raft – the prestige of seeing their stories depicted on-screen was rivaled by the irony that though they themselves were no longer considered box-office draws, their lives were. Similarly, the glorious reception initially granted to Davis and Swanson’s performances in *All About Eve* and *Sunset Boulevard* eventually gave way to the ignominy of typecasting. As Swanson remarked in her memoirs, “It was Hollywood’s old trick...I could...go on playing [the part]...until at last I became some sort of creepy parody of myself, or rather, of Norma Desmond – a shadow of a shadow” (260). Swanson indeed became irrevocably identified with Norma Desmond, and Davis continued to play variations of the bravura theatrical persona she so perfected as Margo Channing.

It is this role that she revisits in *The Star*, a virtual conjunction of *Sunset Boulevard* and *All About Eve*, in which Davis plays an aging and all-but forgotten actress named Margaret Elliot (with, incidentally, a young Natalie Wood cast as her daughter). Near the conclusion of the film, Margaret must submit to a screen test in the hopes of landing a comeback role. Though the part is that of a mature woman, Margaret plays the scene as a coquettish ingénue – a grave mistake that she faces when she eventually watches the test. Alone in the screening room, Margaret realizes how pathetic are

her attempts to remain an ideal of youthful beauty; and in a moment that distinctly recalls Norma Desmond's moment in the dark with *Queen Kelly*, Margaret stands in dismay between the screen and the light of the projector.

This film exemplifies the *mise en abîme* effect in place in the grand cinematic performance time of a changing Hollywood: The medium of film has embalmed the disgrace of Margaret's screen test, just as *The Star* itself – like the reflexive Hollywood pictures before and after it – preserves forever the plight of an actress in transition from the glory of the past to the disappointments of the present...starring an actress forced to reevaluate her own career. In 1955, only three years after the making of *The Star*, the major Hollywood studios reevaluated their own position in the changing industry and began to engage in television production – what historian Thomas Schatz terms a “recolonization” (276) that signaled the definitive dissolution of the cinematic dream-factory that defined the studio era. The time-space of classic Hollywood ceded, in this way, to a new era.

It is, finally, the fragility of the human experience in the world of performance, whether on a film set or a Broadway stage, that *Sunset Boulevard* and *All About Eve* capture; the delicate balance between past, present, and future, nostalgia and regret negotiated by those who must redefine their relationships to a dimension of ideality. Yet within that performance time, as Marks has noted,

haptic visuality allows the spectator to “activate inert presences...and make them volatile so that they intervene in the present” (201). Past, then, is ever-present through the phenomenological engagement of the haptic viewer. With this intersection between the spatio-temporal territory of the film and the commensurately expansive perspective of the haptic viewer, Norma/Swanson, Margo/Davis, and Eve/Baxter stand as figures from an era not forgotten but suspended – mummified, in Bazinian terms, only to reawaken through the spectator’s own co-presence with the cinematic entity. It is this process of reanimation, then, that is perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the “*living* artistic perception” (243) heralded by Bakhtin in relation to the chronotope.

In *Limelight* (1952), Charlie Chaplin’s own elegiac commentary on the rise and fall of a star, his character, a stage performer named Calvero, remarks, “Time is the great author. It always writes the perfect ending.” What remains with the audience at the conclusion of *Sunset Boulevard* and *All About Eve*, however, is the awareness that the cinematic chronotope of performance time itself is *unending*. An ostensible conclusion merges with the potential for a renaissance; a seeming resolution co-exists with the possibility of what could-have-been. Granting spatial expression to this temporal dimensionality are sites equally fluid in their significance, extending from the diegetic realm on-screen to the existential situation of both a historical reality and an off-screen

spectator. As Bill Sampson remarked in *All About Eve*, the world of performance cannot be contained within the limits of a traditional spatio-temporality. It exists, ultimately, “wherever there’s magic.”

Chapter VI

Marilyn Monroe: “The last glimmering of the sacred”

I.

In a scene taking place early in John Huston’s 1961 film *The Misfits*, Roslyn, a divorcée played by Marilyn Monroe, entralls Gay, an aging cowboy played by Clark Gable. The sequence opens in a standard medium two-shot of the couple seated in a car, with the subsequent image of Roslyn introducing a series of shot/reverse-shots in medium close-up that lasts throughout the remainder of the sequence. As Gay gazes at Roslyn, he tells her, “You’re a real beautiful woman”; after which there is a cut to a close-up of Roslyn/Monroe, who responds by smiling, tilting her head back, and lifting her hand to her face as though to brush the hair out of her eyes. In a single fluid gesture, she traces the frame of her visage with a wordless eloquence that bespeaks both gratitude to Gay and a gracious acknowledgement of the verity of his statement. He continues, “It’s almost kind of an honor sitting next to you. You just shine in my eyes.” Indeed, this close-up of Monroe radiates in its black-and-white cinematography with a diffused light that accentuates the intrinsic luminosity of her skin and hair, evoking the almost iridescent quality of her material form. In a realist filmic body that otherwise resists the idealization of its characters and landscape, this is a moment of nearly supernatural suspension – a

meditation on the aesthetic capaciousness of cinema itself and Monroe especially.

Literally “shining” in her beauty in this shot from her final completed film, Monroe here gives definitive expression to the concept of the female star as the extraordinary embodied, the ideal double of the spectator’s off-screen reality. As Edgar Morin remarks, the star “focus[es] love’s magic on [herself]...[She] is above all an actress...who becomes the subject of the myth of love” (*The Stars* 30) – and certainly as Monroe basks in the admiration of both her diegetic lover and extra-diegetic audience, she epitomizes the awareness of one’s own loveliness that has characterized narcissism since Ovid’s original account. In this image from *The Misfits*, her valedictory mythic moment of love, Monroe confirms that the captivating appeal of the cinematic Narcissus is, to borrow from René Girard’s analysis of the narcissistic woman, “not an earthly thing; it is the last glimmering of the sacred” (375).

Throughout his discussion, Girard maintains a concern with the rapport between the actual and the mythical. Deconstructing Freud’s concept of narcissism as a strategy of coquetry, Girard outlines a deliberate overlaying of a need for the desire of the other with the guise of self-sufficiency – rejecting Freud himself, who, as the theorist remarks, “takes the phantom [of the narcissistic woman] for true being” (370, 374). Certainly these questions of the earthly and sacred, the strategic and authentic relate to the various actresses

studied throughout this project; their myriad diegetic identities, projected personas, and bodily presences distilling to a fundamental interplay between the ethereal and the corporeal. Yet approaching Marilyn Monroe herself as “the last glimmering of the sacred” allows for an understanding of both her place in the greater context of classic Hollywood femininity and the unique incandescence – “glimmering” – of her photographic presence.

Like Rita Hayworth before her, Monroe brings to her films a *photogénie* that heightens the vitality of the cinematic body; but where the unrelenting dynamism of Hayworth’s motility intertwines itself with the unreeling of the movie as a complementary life force, Monroe exists on the screen as a more ethereal subjectivity within the corporeal facticity of the cinematic lived-body. To apply Roland Barthes’s description of the *punctum* in his text *Camera Lucida*, Monroe is the “floating flash” (53) of impact and attraction moving through the cinematic image, an embodied yet elusive point of magnetism that compels the gaze even as it transcends its proprietary constraints. In the development of her cinematic subjectivity and materiality – from the unstable young woman caught between nightmare and fantasy in *Don’t Bother to Knock* to the polished coquetry of an egocentric showgirl in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*; the wistful aspirations of a dreamer in *Bus Stop* to the fragile searcher in *The Misfits* – Monroe presents the identity of the movie star not as an one-dimensional *fait accompli* but as an ever-evolving process of

self-definition. As the last glimmering of the classic Hollywood star presence, Monroe shifts back and forth through the looking glass that stands between the ideal and earthly, the “phantom” and “true being” – a synthesis of experience that calls to mind Vivian Sobchack’s assertion that through the “unity of the look,” the “camera eye finds the *sublime* and the *spiritual* in the open indeterminacy of the world’s *materiality*” (emphases mine; *Carnal* 301).⁶⁶

Transcending contradiction: The coquette, the *punctum*, and phenomenological dialogue

In his study of the narcissistic woman, Girard relates the question of self-love to his overarching concern with the rapport between the model/ideal and disciple/rival. Declaring that “desire attracts desire,” he describes the ostensible self-sufficiency of the coquette as merely “the metaphysical transformation” of the omnipresent model of mimetic rivalry (370).⁶⁷ In his summary of the “mimetic seduction” of the coquette, Girard reveals the machinations of a performer in a romantic scenario: “[W]hen she pretends to desire herself and suggests to Freud a kind of circular desire that never gets outside itself, she offers an irresistible temptation to the mimetic desire of others” (371, 370). Acting as if she takes her very self as both model and object, the coquette inspires the amorous energy of a disciple ever-searching for a desire to imitate and an ideal

⁶⁶ It should be noted that Sobchack employs the term “unity of the look” in specific relation to a filmic gaze that creates an equivalence between animate, human subjects and inanimate objects. This chapter, however, will apply – in part – Sobchack’s terminology to craft an understanding of Marilyn Monroe’s own active, cinematic union of material facticity and *immaterial* aura.

⁶⁷ Please see extensive discussion of mimetic rivalry in Chapter II.

to covet. Further analyzing the compelling nature of this figure, Girard depicts the milieu of desire inhabited by the coquette: “The intact narcissism of the other is the indescribable paradise where the beings that we desire appear to live... They give us the impression that no obstacle exists for them and that they are never in need of anything” (375). In this *mise en scène* providing the context for the plotting of the coquette, the model and her disciple act out desire in an “indescribable paradise” reminiscent of the original riverbank upon which Narcissus first gazed at his reflection – or, perhaps even more aptly, an Eden of alluring autonomy and divine self-containment.

Yet even as Girard examines the pure spectacle of the coquette’s “dazzling illusion of a self-sufficiency” (371), he warns against assuming a myopic understanding of the phenomenon of narcissism. Rather than propose a reading of coquetry as a strictly self-serving feminine calculation driven by a single subjectivity, Girard calls attention to the dialogue always already in place between a given set of doubles: “a form of reciprocal support and collaboration, contributing to the blossoming of mimetism and the illusions that accompany it” (371). Even before making this statement, Girard admits that he uses the word “strategy” with caution – noting that the term “implies rather too much lucidity and an untenable, clear-cut division between the mask and the real face behind it” (ibid). In an effort to not “limit the substance” (ibid) of the

various subjectivities engaged in this manifestation of desire, then, the theorist allows for the interplay, a kind of osmosis, between the ideal model (“mask”) and actual disciple (“real face”) that coexist within the psyche of an individual.⁶⁸

With his use of the language of performance – writing of pretence, illusion, and the “indescribable paradise” within which narcissistic desire plays out – Girard evokes a spectacular universe that directly recalls the cinematic realm explored by Morin. In *The Stars*, he likewise seeks to appreciate the duality of the actress who embodies “the confrontation of myth and reality, appearance and essence” (48) as she designs her personal myth of love. Extending this discussion, Morin comments upon the innate persona suggested by the star’s physical presence and cultivated by the roles and films in which she appears. According to Morin, each star bears an “immediate, natural signification and expression of...face and body” in which her “myth is already inscribed” (127, 130). With a sense of aesthetic fatalism, Morin describes “the sacred mystery” (130) of the star’s cinematic appeal in his own theory of the mask and the self:

These faces are the masks that immediately express strength or tenderness, innocence or experience, virility or kindness, and more generally a superhuman quality, a divine harmony, that we call *beauty*. (131)

⁶⁸ Certainly such questions of masks and femininity bring to mind Mary Ann Doane’s essay “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator,” in which she asserts that “womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed” (25). Where Doane focuses on the expressly psychoanalytic implications of the relationship between woman, the masquerade, and the image, however, this chapter will seek to explore the phenomenological stakes of the interplay between the mask and the lived-bodies of the cinematic form, star, and spectator.

Responding to the physiognomy of the actress, the spectator perceives her as the embodiment of an archetypal virtue or vice, the bearer of a “mask” and a myth that belongs not only to her but to the collective awareness of the entire audience. For Morin, this mask of photogenic impact represents an innate construct within the physicality of the star, a corporeal foundation from which an unearthly, “superhuman” charisma radiates.

Girard and Morin’s concern with the intertwining between “the mask and the real self” and the “appearance and essence” of the on-screen figure, respectively, finds a specifically photographic application in Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*.⁶⁹ In this work, Barthes uses the term “air” to describe the ethereality that surrounds the human form captured within a photograph. He writes of the air as “the luminous shadow which accompanies the body; and if the photograph fails to show this air...there remains no more than a sterile body” (110). The air of an individual is not so much a mask as an aura – yet its distinctly otherworldly, *immaterial* presence recalls the glimmering of Girard’s idealized mask of coquetry and the “superhuman” radiance of the Morinian star. What Barthes perceives in a photograph, ultimately, is the union of the natural form and its supernatural “bright shadow” (*ibid.*).

Of course, Barthes distinguishes between the impact of photography and cinema, noting that they diverge in their respective

⁶⁹ In *Death 24x a Second*, Laura Mulvey provides an illuminating comparison of Barthes and André Bazin’s respective theories of the photographic index (54 – 66).

relationships to movement: Where the stillness of the pose defines the photographic image, cinema requires the constant motion of its subjects – thus creating an aesthetic contrast between the stasis of the photograph and the dynamic ephemerality of the filmic “passing” before the eye of the camera (78). According to Barthes, the photograph stands complete and unto itself within the context of its frame, while the restless film “is impelled, ceaselessly drawn” forward in its search to depict other phenomena (90). Within this motility lies the liberation of the film’s human subjects, allowing them to “emerge...[and] continue...living” (57) an existence independent of the immediate shot. Yet for Barthes, the *punctum*, or point of striking awareness that attracts the eye and unsettles the composition of the picture, grants the photographed subject a similar freedom.

He defines the *punctum* as “this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (26). Through this process of perception and affect-ion, the photographed entity suddenly attains “a whole life external to [his/] her portrait” (57), an entire existential situation glimpsed in the parameters of a tableau. Though Barthes goes on to relate the *punctum* to the inevitability of death that haunts that existence so captured in photographic imagery – the camera depicts both “*this will be* and *this has been*...[the viewer] observe[s]...an anterior future of which death is the stake” (96) – in the viewer’s own life “external to the portrait” the *punctum*

bears an indefinable force. As he describes it, “The effect is certain but unlocatable...[I]t is sharp and yet lands in a vague zone of myself...[I]t cries out in silence. Odd contradiction: a floating flash” (51, 53).

In a dialogue between the subjectivity of the work and that of the viewer, then, the *punctum* represents “what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*” (55) – an exchange of subjectivities, each bringing to the other both discrete and shared experiences. Such a relationship between viewing- and viewed-entity directly presages Sobchack’s theory of the reciprocal engagement between spectator and film. In an assertion of “our own *reversibility* as subjects and objects” (*Carnal* 288), Sobchack calls for a cinematic interplay wherein “meaning and value emerg[e]...in the *synthesis* of the experience’s *subjective* and *objective* aspects” (*Carnal* 2). According to Sobchack, the conjunction of the embodied perspectives offered by the film (“what is already there”) and the spectator (“what is added”) allows for the “moments of divergence and rupture and...convergence and rapture” (*Address* 286) that define communication between animate entities. Just as the Barthesian viewer heightens his/her emotional investment in the photograph through the fusion of “what s/he adds” and “what is already there,” the phenomenological approach to cinema requires a parallel sensorial exchange in order to fully appreciate the existential situation of the filmic world and its inhabitants.

Ultimately, what links Girard and Morin's masquerade, Barthes's *punctum*, and Sobchack's phenomenology is an overarching concern with the intersection rather than the severance of dual registers of experience: the mythic mask, or air, of self-sufficiency and "divine harmony" that overlays the actual self; the point of affect in an image created by the merging of viewed and viewing consciousness; and the fluidity between the subjectivities of a film and its spectator. To apply Sobchack's phrasing, each of the theorists explores the "moments of...convergence and rapture" (*Address* 286) that transcend the vagaries of the existential situation, whether human or cinematic – moments that Marilyn Monroe, as the last glimmering, "floating flash" of classic Hollywood femininity, continually reflects and inspires in her performances.

Understanding on the screen

In a description of the lived-body that could apply equally well to either the human or cinematic form, Sobchack writes of it as "excessive and ambiguous in its materiality, its polymorphism, and its production of existential meaning," capable of bearing an "excessive, ambiguous, and over-running semiosis" (*Address* 144). Certainly biographies, novels, and various other media have analyzed *ad infinitum* the many facets of Monroe's personal, off-screen identity, attempting to claim her for various systems of meaning. As S. Paige Baty remarks, Monroe has been "'re-membered' into collective life" (18) since her untimely passing at the age of 36, an

over-determined figure composed of fragmented images, cautionary tales, and conspiracy theories. Truly, the massive reproduction of Monroe's image in popular culture has led to an acceptance of her as a ubiquitous static icon – forever seductive with platinum hair, beauty mark, and voluptuous figure – in this way neglecting the polymorphism of her cinematic materiality.

Critics like Baty, Sarah Churchwell, Richard Dyer, Laura Mulvey, and Graham McCann have, however, contributed insightful studies that survey the implications of Monroe's appeal; and Carl Rollyson's book *Marilyn Monroe: The Life of an Actress* offers keen close-readings of her performances, exploring the dramatic influences that shaped her style of acting and, in certain instances, the direction of her life itself. These valuable works illuminate various elements that help to create and sustain the magnetism of Monroe's persona – but the actress herself proposed perhaps the most essential approach of appreciation: “To really say what's in my heart, I'd rather show than to say. Even though I want people to understand, *I'd much rather they understand on the screen*” (emphasis mine; in McCann 202).

In so adopting Monroe's uncanny anticipation of Barthes's contention that the photograph “cannot say what it lets us see” (100), we must explore what it is that we “understand” in her on-screen presence. Both extra- and intra-diegetically, her roles in *Don't Bother to Knock*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *Bus Stop*, and *The*

Misfits – four films that represent the arcing of her cinematic lifetime – speak to a shifting process of self-definition. In her portrayals of four women who are, respectively, volatile, ambitious, hopeful, and displaced, Monroe and her progressively refined performances bear an implicit awareness of the nuances between mask and real self. Moving from delusional romanticism (Nell in *Don't Bother to Knock*) to cheerful calculation (Lorelei in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*), fragile aspiration (Cherie in *Bus Stop*) to forlorn idealism (Roslyn in *The Misfits*), Monroe explores the complex relationship between performativity and self-discovery negotiated by both character and movie star.

Further understood in Monroe on-the-screen is her significance as the Barthesian “floating flash” of the images, an animate *punctum* opening up the body of the film in her own union between lived-body and surrounding air, the true being and accompanying phantom. Indeed, when describing Monroe’s talent, John Huston spoke of her in terms that distinctly recall the language used by Girard and Barthes:

What really counts in film acting is that *rare moment* – just a *flickering* when through the eyes you get a *glimpse* of the real meaning of the character. It is not technique or professionalism, just truth... Monroe had it. (Emphases mine; in Rollyson 201).

Far from occupying an “indescribable paradise” of enclosed ideality, Monroe instead inhabits a cinematic landscape comprised of rare moments and flickerings, engaging the viewer in flashes of

otherworldliness and glimpses of actuality. For in the phenomenological encompassing of the material and ineffable, that cinematic realm occupied by Monroe transforms into a site of shared experience between the on-screen entity and off-screen spectator. This reciprocal existential investment between the *punctum* and her perceiver stands, therefore, as perhaps the most fully realized form of understanding on – and through – the screen.

II.

Don't Bother to Knock: The mask and the mirror

The question of self-awareness has consistently shadowed the greater context of Monroe's persona. Both Churchwell and Dyer have commented specifically upon the narcissistic overtones of her image, with the latter attributing it to the heavily psychoanalyzed construct of feminine sexuality in 1950s America (*Heavenly* 49); Churchwell, however, surveys the biographical literature on Monroe to trace claims of the star's personal egocentrism. In a final assessment that implicitly addresses the questions of mask and real self that will guide this discussion, Churchwell points out that Monroe's alleged narcissism "would seem to be less about self-love than about artistry: her body was her work of art... What others see as narcissism Monroe saw as work: it was part of her attempt to control how she was seen" (199 – 200) in a studio-era industry notorious for its manipulation of stars. Monroe herself candidly acknowledged narcissism as a near-necessity in the life of an actress and celebrity:

“Marilyn Monroe has to look a certain way – be *beautiful* – and act a certain way, be talented...[W]e actors and actresses are such worriers, such...Narcissus types” (in Weatherby 147). Aware of ideality not as a longed-for register of experience but an existential expectation, Monroe here articulates the practical exigencies that underlie the actress’s role within the Morinian myth of love.



Two images capturing the elements of narcissism in Monroe’s persona.

Certainly no star surpasses Monroe in the filmic affect of both her physical presence and accompanying myth, to recall Morin’s terms; yet as her performance in *Don’t Bother to Knock* demonstrates, this “divine harmony” now so immediately recognizable was not always “already inscribed” within her person. In her first starring role under contract at Twentieth-Century Fox,⁷⁰ Monroe plays Nell Forbes, a young woman recently released from a mental institution who now finds herself working as a baby-sitter for a wealthy couple in a hotel. After a flirtation with Jed Towers

⁷⁰ Technically, the first starring role of Monroe’s career came in *Ladies of the Chorus* (Phil Karlson, 1949), a B-movie made at Columbia Studios.

(Richard Widmark), a guest at the hotel, a delusional Nell becomes obsessed with him and attempts to overcome the misery of her reality by enacting her romantic fantasies with often-violent results.

Portraying a woman struggling, to paraphrase Monroe's statement, to look and act "a certain way" in the formation of her identity, here Monroe herself begins to refine the mask of her persona in a transition from starlet to star – an adolescence-of-stardom paralleled by the filmic body's own tentative emergence from the *haute* period of *noir* to sensationalist melodrama.

After a conventional establishing exterior shot of New York City at night, the narrative of the film begins with a close-up of a small sign reading, "Make this more than a hotel; make it your home." Indeed, with the action taking place entirely within the interiors of the building, the site becomes "more than a hotel": It is a limbo wherein the leading characters' existences take shape. Jed, a pilot flying constantly between New York and Chicago, arrives at the hotel in order to reconcile with his girlfriend, a singer in the bar (played by Anne Bancroft); Eddie (Elisha Cook, Jr.), Nell's uncle, surveys the comings and goings of the guests as he operates the monotonous trajectory of the elevator; and for Nell, the hotel serves as a suitably vague landscape upon which to project her mournful dreams of reuniting with her dead lover. In this not unpleasant, bustling stop-over for the transitory (filmed in high-key black-and-white cinematography), none of these is more transient in body and

spirit than Nell, whom Jed describes as “silk on one side and sandpaper on the other.”

Alternately a victim and a *femme fatale*, a dejected wanderer and a purposeful coquette, Nell and the various facets of her nature overwhelm the bland anonymity of the McKinley. She is a character driven by desperate hopes: that she may see Philip, the man whose death caused her suicide attempt, once more; that she could afford the elegant clothes and jewelry owned by the mother of the child she is watching; and that she could be an object of admiration and love for both herself and others. Nell is, to adopt Morin’s vocabulary, a young woman who wears multiple masks – those of “strength or tenderness, innocence or experience” – in a poignant effort to claim an identity. As she responds to Jed’s above remark, “I’ll be any way you want me to be.”

In commenting upon the vagueness of Nell’s character, Rollyson notes that for the spectator, “there is no sure way to connect with her” (51). There is, by extension, “no sure way” to identify with the actress who embodies her – a woman equally in the process of self-definition, discovering what would become “the sacred mystery” of her star presence. Familiar to the audience only as a supporting player in her earlier films, now playing a fragmented personality, Monroe here encounters a dimension of disconnection between herself and the spectator in both extra- and intra-diegetic terms. Yet the *punctum* of Monroe’s performance lies within that very

uncertainty, the inclusion of the spectator in the process of the actress's transition into movie-star ideality – not, as with Katharine Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year*, through the framework of a meta-myth of stardom, but rather through a filmic body whose stylistic and narrative structure explores the human element that underlies the Morinian star-as-*superhuman*.

Jed: You're a gal with a lot of variations.

In her first moments in *Don't Bother to Knock*, Nell/Monroe appears as a figure lacking substance or distinction, wandering through the revolving doors of the McKinley Hotel and making a desultory path to the elevator. Wearing a drab hat and wrinkled dress, and with her hair darkened to a light brown, Monroe enters the tableau of the medium long-shot not as a star but a comely young woman, almost unremarkable – were it not for the fairness of her skin, striking even in the low-contrast lighting. A close-up that occurs in her subsequent exchange with Eddie in the elevator highlights this presentation of Monroe as a “mere mortal,” with her latent luminosity confined primarily to her eyes as she listens to her uncle's ramblings with a wary melancholy. Even her physicality bespeaks a kind of reserve: Upon meeting the family whose child she will watch, Nell holds herself at a remove, guarded and distant from the flurry of pleasantries. Altogether, these opening images work to establish Nell/Monroe as a blank corporeal canvas, one upon which

her – and, later, Jed’s – fantasies of glamour and sexual attractiveness may be projected.



Nell/Monroe's first close-up.

The neutrality of this initial impression, however, serves to emphasize the impact of Nell/Monroe’s transformation as she gradually appropriates the persona of a wealthy glamour girl. While Bunny, the child whom she is baby-sitting, sleeps in the adjoining room of the hotel suite, Nell approaches the vanity table upon which the girl’s mother has placed her belongings. Standing in profile in a medium shot, Nell first applies a drop of perfume, and then opens a jewelry box and takes out earrings and a bracelet. After she sits down eagerly at the table to put on the jewelry, there is a cut to a closer medium shot that faces Nell directly – with the camera in this way assuming the place of the mirror. From this perspective, the shot captures Nell’s hesitant pleasure turning to sheer narcissistic delight at her reflection; what Rollyson describes as “the wondering manner of a child” as her physical unease evolves into a more “forthright” and confident bearing (49).

Certainly Rollyson's commentary on this image recalls the language of the Lacanian mirror stage, the moment wherein the real *je* catches its first glimpse of the ideal *moi*. The mirror stands as a medium of potential, a channel of possibility – not only, in this scene, for Nell to play at being “some movie star” (ibid) but for Monroe herself to realize her promise as a star presence. With her emergence as an actress and a persona, Monroe is at the beginning of her cinematic lifetime, on the verge of stardom and courting the gaze of the camera just as Nell seeks the *moi* of her reflection. As a cinematic counterpart to the Barthesian “vague zone” (53) of the spectator's consciousness, the *punctum* of this image lies in Monroe-as-Nell's very uncertainty within the dimension between ideality and reality; her desire, that is, to overcome an essential insecurity and look and act a “certain way.” As Monroe tries on the accoutrements of luxury in a cinematic moment preceding the Technicolor splendor of her subsequent films, the audience observes the process of constructing what would, for a time, stand as the star's mask of glamorous sensuality before the camera-as-mirror.



After facing the camera-as-mirror.

In *The Imaginary Signifier*, Christian Metz famously declared that “film is like the mirror,” appealing to the spectator’s own memory of the imaginary with its ability to “return...us everything but ourselves” (45, 49). Further, according to Metz, the spectator “can do no other” than submit to a primary identification with the eye of the camera itself (49). Later, he describes film as a “beautiful closed object which must remain unaware of the pleasure it gives us” (99), thus affirming the monologic investment and animation of the spectator. Yet in this shot, the camera itself is the mirror – one that does not “return” Monroe to the spectator as an object intact but rather as a dynamic subject defining herself; a subject who, moreover, appeals to the camera-as-mirror not in a narcissistic rapport between star and apparatus but in an existential exploration of how she may become the ideal that will “give pleasure” to the audience. In contrast to the egocentric creed of Metz’s spectator – “The film is what I receive, and it is also what I release” (51) – this image calls for an understanding of what Sobchack terms the

“address of the eye”: that dialogue between “two ‘material residences’ and two ‘intending residents’” (*Address* 262) who share their perception and expression of phenomena both on and off the screen in the formation of the cinematic experience. What heightens the impact of the shot, ultimately, is the fact that the on-screen figure herself, the human form within the cinematic body, so clearly takes part in this nexus of subjectivities. For in so directly addressing the camera, Monroe implicitly addresses the spectator.

In considering this alliance between on-screen life forces, it is fitting that Nell/Monroe’s transformation should signal a shift in the body of the film itself. With the low-contrast lighting of the shot, and only the diegetic noise of traffic on the soundtrack, the image seems less of a finished product than a kind of screen test; yet as the momentum of Nell/Monroe’s metamorphosis from comely girl to seductive woman increases in subsequent scenes, the filmic body begins to incorporate equally unsettling infusions of *noir* elements. After Nell has adopted the complete costume of opulence – perfume, negligée, heels and jewelry – and attracted Jed’s attention from the window across the court, she enters Bunny’s room and coerces her into silence. Looming over the child’s bed in the inky shadows, with only the streetlights shining into the room, Nell/Monroe belongs utterly to this sinister atmosphere that so recalls the aesthetic heritage of *film noir*. Far from the shy young girl seen in the opening of the movie, Nell/Monroe dominates the tableau of the shot as a fully

realized *femme fatale* who is, as the audience later learns, capable of harming the child who stands in the way of her desires.



Nell as *femme fatale*.

Later in the film, after Eddie insists that Nell remove her employer's clothes, a point-of-view shot from Bunny's perspective adopts the keyhole framing of the child's surreptitious gaze – a technique that might have been trite were it not for the almost expressionistic prurience of the tableau. With a closet door dividing Nell and Eddie, the former changes from the negligée back into her dress while the latter sits to the left of the door, a claustrophobic image that makes explicit the incestuous undertones of the rapport between Nell and her uncle. Just as she has brought a disturbing sexuality to the cheerful, almost saccharine domestic realm of the family's hotel room, so too does Nell's transformation inspire a deviation from the high-key illumination and bourgeois realism of the film's contemporary *mise en scène*. In this way, the cinematic body explores the possibilities of its own mask of self-definition in conjunction with Nell and Monroe. Placing her alternately within

low-contrast lighting patterns and sinister shadows, the film engages with this on-screen figure as a means of negotiating its place within the *noir* tradition and the exigencies of a low-budget melodrama. To paraphrase Jed, both Nell/Monroe and *Don't Bother to Knock* reveal themselves to be entities with “a lot of variations.”

Nell: You like the way I look?

With the movie's evocation of its *film noir* heritage in both narrative and stylistic terms comes a *mise en abîme* effect for the spectator, a sense that s/he is watching the unreeling of a film-within-a-film and, as well, the development of Nell as a character-within-a-character. If the camera-as-mirror shot highlights the dialogical exchange between actress, film, and viewer, then Jed's first sight of Nell signals the ostensible success of her metamorphosis from a comely young girl to a striking woman. After the scene of her first appeal to the mirror, Nell next appears in a point-of-view shot from Jed's perspective, framed within the window of the hotel room that faces his own across the court. Now completely costumed in Bunny's mother's clothes, Nell dances alone in the hotel room, her confident movements contrasting the desultoriness that characterized her initial motility. Finally realizing that she has an audience in Jed, Nell flirts with the young man over the telephone and then allows him to visit her in the suite. By the time Jed arrives, Nell has assumed a completely other persona – playful and assured, her coquettish alter ego confirming Girard's contention that “nothing is

more apt to...reassure[e] us about ourselves...than the spectacle of others taking us for their object of desire” (371).⁷¹



The object of Jed's desire.

Truly, with a gaze that perceives Nell as simply an attractive object, Jed undoubtedly exemplifies the reductive and controlling male psyche discussed by Mulvey; and with the woman framed within a window that takes on the proportions of a film screen, the point-of-view shot seems to indicate the camera's collusion with this scopophilic desire. In considering the emphasis on Nell's transformation from real to ideal that precedes and follows the window-sequence, however, this vignette of visual pleasure stands unto itself as a nearly self-conscious exercise in presenting the spectacle of the female star. For in the moments before Jed arrives at the suite to meet the mysterious woman upon whom he may project his fantasies, Nell sits down to reapply her lipstick in a blithe reprise of her earlier, more hesitant *maquillage*. In a medium close-up, the

⁷¹ In a subsequent leading role in *Niagara* (Henry Hathaway, 1953), Monroe would further develop this sense of *fatale* coquetry in her portrayal of a cheating wife who plots to murder her husband (Joseph Cotten).

back of Nell/Monroe's head remains to the left of the frame while to the right of the shot her face is reflected in the hand mirror she holds – a diffused, untarnished image of loveliness that vanishes as the camera pans down to focus on her wrists, scarred from her suicide attempt in a shocking contrast to the diamond bracelet she wears.

As referenced in preceding chapters, Iris M. Young has analyzed the “double spatiality” that defines feminine existence, a vexed relationship between self and space that divides a limited “here” with an expansive “yonder” – the constraints of the former keeping the woman “rooted *in place*” as an object “*looked at an acted upon*,” and the latter remaining an elusive realm of uninhibited motility (“Throwing” 38, 40 – 41). Certainly this shot defines the parameters of Nell's double spatiality in terms of her narcissistic desires: Where the mirror holds the promise of utter beauty, an idealized dimension to which Nell aspires to belong, the material trace of her suicide attempt grounds the young woman in a wounded (corpo)reality. Regarding the image with an awareness of the situation of the female star, furthermore, renders the shot an unsettling revelation of the discontinuity between real and ideal, corporeal and ethereal. Though star presence demands the union of these dual modes, the triumph of the *je* aligning with the *moi*, the juxtaposition of Monroe's mirrored visage – her mask – with her scarred (for the purposes of the narrative) wrists strikes the viewer

with its assertion that the “divine harmony” written of by Morin is *attained* by rather than *innate* within the body of the star.

This process of subverting the idea of the idol continues, as later in the film Nell begins to reveal the delusions that impel her flirtation with Jed. After Nell learns that Jed works as a pilot, there is a cut to an extreme close-up of her that magnifies the glamorous image reflected earlier in the hand mirror, exalting the most perfect version of Nell/Monroe’s mask – even as the subsequent shot discloses the fragility of that “divine harmony.” In that image, Nell turns her back to Jed and walks once again to the mirror, facing that “yonder” space of possibility as she begins to create an alternative reality: one in which Philip, the lover whose plane crashed, managed to survive and return to her in the guise of Jed. As Rollyson remarks, Jed functions here, like the mirror itself, only as “a screen on which she can project” her fantastic visions (51). While Nell constructs this narrative in an appeal to her mirrored self, the shining quality projected in the close-up fades to shadow as it becomes clear that her idealized reflection takes shape only within hallucinations. Indeed, Nell seems to recount the scenario from another film entirely, casting herself as a character from a war-time romance with a happy ending. Filled with passion and courage, it is an epic tale from Hollywood’s World War II-era that stands in poignant contrast to the cheerful blandness of the film’s early-1950’s setting.

Beyond contributing to the overall *mise en abîme* effect, this narrative-within-a-narrative also serves to underscore the “variations” of the filmic body itself. It is an entity in transition, the cinematic form referencing its heritage in the phasing from the 1940s’ canon of *noir* and war-time romance into the innocuousness of low-budget melodrama. Intertwined with this shifting life force, both Nell and Monroe occupy their own precipitous position, a double spatiality, on the threshold between reality and ideality. As Nell/Monroe stands before the mirror, unsure of the distinction between fantasy and actuality, the allure of a projected persona and the exigencies of a material body, the diegetic heroine and extra-diegetic star find themselves in a limbo of incipient potential – with only Monroe emerging from this cinematic adolescence to claim her place in the “yonder” of total stardom.

Nell: You won't know me.

By the conclusion of *Don't Bother to Knock*, Nell has nearly destroyed both herself and those around her with a blind desire to live out her fantasies: She almost pushes Bunny from a window because she believes the child is keeping her from Jed/“Philip”; she attacks her uncle when he tries to discourage her from pursuing Jed; and after a struggle with Bunny’s outraged mother, Nell makes her way to the hotel lobby with the intention of buying razors with which to kill herself. In the elevator, a disoriented Nell stands before the last in the series of mirrors that have so seduced her throughout the film.

Once again wearing the drab dress, with her hair mussed and a scratch on her face, Nell peers into the looking glass with dazed distress at her appearance. In a final attempt to reclaim her fleeting coquettish persona, she turns to the elevator operator and says with an exhausted coyness, "I'll have to get a new [dress]. You won't know me in it."

The fact that Nell does not even know herself enhances the poignancy of this statement. "Silk on one side and sandpaper on the other," heartbreaking and vicious at turns, Nell continually assumes the alter ego of her wished-for identity only to abandon it again; like the negligée she takes from Bunny's mother's closet, Nell finds that her mask "fits...practically." What bespeaks unbalance in Nell, however, translates into a versatile performance for Monroe. Exploring the possibilities of her own burgeoning persona, the dimensions of a mask that would soon convey the divine harmony of stardom, Monroe brings to her portrayal of Nell a parallel awareness of the starlet's process of self-definition. Only three years later, after Monroe's phenomenal success in Hollywood, *The Seven Year Itch* (directed by Billy Wilder) would offer a light-hearted comedic interpretation of the Jed-Nell attraction: man sees a beautiful enigma in the neighboring flat, fantasizes about romantic possibilities, and finally realizes that she is less a *femme fatale* than an ingénue. Truly, where the filmic body of *Don't Bother to Knock* in all its variations captures an actress in transformation, the Technicolor confidence of

Wilder's film emblemizes the spectacle of Monroe as an established star – framing an iconographic star presence that finds its foundation in Nell's ideal self. In viewing this cinematic adolescence in the greater context of Monroe's *oeuvre*, what strikes the retrospective gaze of the audience is that, in fact, it *will* “know” her.

III.

The value of visuality: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and the exchange of the look

In reflecting upon the experience of making the film that would become one of her most popular, Monroe spoke of the lack of respect with which she was treated by Twentieth-Century Fox: “...[T]hey always kept saying, ‘Remember, you’re not a star.’ I said, ‘Well, whatever I am, I *am* the blonde!’” (in Rollyson 208) Certainly the inanity of the studio's attitude towards the actress and the straightforward indignation with which she rightfully responded renders the exchange a rueful account of studio-system politics; yet the simplicity of Monroe's words belies their significance. In a cinematic body alternately celebrating and examining the spectacular construct of glamour and feminine sensuality,⁷² Monroe is essential not only because she is the eponymous “blonde” but because her presence on the screen determines the film's overall approach to visuality. As Lorelei Lee, a gold-digging showgirl both vague and canny, Monroe draws the gaze of the spectator as effortlessly as she

⁷² In her discussion of the film, Maureen Turim describes the film as negotiating a “perniciously thin” boundary between “celebration” and “satire” (101).

attracts the attention of her diegetic admirers – only to exercise the powers of her own perception as, to adopt Sobchack’s definition of the lived-body, “both an objective *subject* and a subjective *object*” (*Carnal* 2) in search of wealthy men. Where Sobchack’s “unity of the look” offers a transcendent “equivalence between human flesh and the flesh of things” (301), Lorelei employs what this discussion will term an “exchange of the look”: a fluid visuality in which the roles of bearer of the gaze and object thereof are not diametrically opposed but ever-traded in a fusion of corporeal subjectivity and material interest. This marriage between the corporeal and material, in turn, translates into the spectator’s phenomenological appreciation of the film as a continuum of Technicolor opulence comprised of animate and inanimate forms.

Undoubtedly, the notion of Lorelei’s objectification, however comedic, raises feminist concerns, especially in considering the film’s emphasis on the commensurate worth of sexual appeal and material wealth. As Laura Mulvey remarks, Lorelei “understands her erotic value simply as exchange value” (*Fetishism and Curiosity* 49) in a world where, as she famously muses in song, “A kiss on the hand may be quite continental, but diamonds are a girl’s best friend.” Wearing a mask of self-sufficiency even as she requires the romantic and financial investments of millionaires, Lorelei’s literally spectacular self-absorption calls to mind Guy Lefort’s comment to Girard about the appeal of a narcissist: “[M]oney is only lent to the

wealthy, and desire always pursues desire, just as money pursues money” (376). Yet *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* does not seek to reduce the woman to merely an embodied form of sexual currency. Instead, it establishes an economy of gazes in which the female *and* male characters’ continually-traded subjectivity and objectivity – their exchange rate, as it were – determines the value of the look in a filmic body that courts the spectator with its own wealth of sensorial luxuries.

Dorothy: You know, I think you’re the only girl in the world who can stand on a stage with a spotlight in her eye and still see a diamond in a man’s pocket.

Emblematic of this fluidity between material object and human subject is a moment early in the film, a turning point in the narrative in which Lorelei meets Sir Francis Beekman, or “Piggy” (played by Charles Coburn). As Lorelei and her best friend, Dorothy (Jane Russell), cruise to France in expectation of Lorelei’s marriage to a millionaire, the meeting with diamond-magnate Piggy sets in motion a series of scandals and misunderstandings all predicated on Lorelei’s desire for a diamond tiara owned by Piggy’s wife. In the initial encounter between Lorelei and the soon-besotted old man, a point-of-view shot from the former’s perspective epitomizes her visual understanding of the world. As she enters the scene at the end of Dorothy’s conversation with Piggy, Lorelei asks, “Did you say diamonds?” – and following her look at him, there is a cut to a medium close-up of Piggy with a large animated diamond gradually

superimposed over his face. There follows a reverse medium-shot of Lorelei, who says with satisfaction, “You *did* say diamonds! I can tell.”



Evaluating Piggy's worth.

In this equation of Piggy with her material desires, Lorelei bears a look that is all-encompassing in its very calculation; perceiving the implicit object-ivity of his human form, she “can tell” his worth with the same instinct that she uses to appraise her own appeal. (As she later says to her fiancé’s skeptical father, “A man being rich is like a girl being pretty. You might not marry a girl just because she’s pretty, but my goodness, doesn’t it help?”) In the parallel visual system of the film’s body, moreover, the reverse shot of Lorelei/Monroe offers a contemplation of her own duality as subject and object. Framed within the close-up, Lorelei/Monroe herself appears as the human counterpart to the diamond she sees in Piggy’s form: With light glinting off her platinum hair and gold earrings, her eyes shining and white teeth smiling brightly, and even the embroidery on her violet dress angled to suggest a diamond, Monroe-as-Lorelei stands out in Technicolor animation against the

drabness of the background. The spectator, then, regards the star as luxury incarnate even as this sparkling entity asserts the autonomy of her own gaze.

In the look so exchanged, the visual trade bespeaks an increase in rather than a depletion of Lorelei's subjective resources. Exercising her understanding of the commensurate value of subjective-objectivity and objective-subjectivity between lived-bodies, Lorelei invests the assessing power of her gaze in Piggy while at the same time claiming her own spectacular objectivity. Here, Lorelei does not, to recall Mulvey's terms, "cut" Piggy to the "measure of her desire" (*Visual* 26) so much as she affirms her own subjective awareness of his objective possibilities. With the spectator's own adoption of this cohesive perspective, furthermore, comes the displacement of the static framework of contemporary mythology in which Monroe has been placed. In so recognizing the united force of the star's corporeal facticity and the more ethereal, innate subjectivity of her unique presence, the viewer recognizes her cinematic existence as an individual rather than an icon.

Indeed, Monroe's significance as the *punctum* of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* heightens this sense of what Barthes calls "a life external to [the] portrait" (57) – the understanding that her presence bespeaks a past and future beyond the immediacy of the image. The opening sequence of the film, a musical number entitled "Two Little Girls from Little Rock," even plays upon the idea of a "back-story"

for both Lorelei and Dorothy. In this sequence, which Maureen Turim describes as providing an intersection between a depiction of the women as objects of “sexual display” and “critical subjects” (103), the showgirls recount their journey to financial/amorous success. Appearing on stage in sequined red dresses and feathered headdresses, Lorelei/Monroe and Dorothy/Russell dance their way through their musical biography with a sultry confidence that belies their early days on “the wrong side of the tracks”; as Rollyson remarks, “no attempt is made to make them look or sound like two little girls from Little Rock” (62). Yet as he also notes, the movie itself rejects any kind of realism, embracing instead a theatrical universe in which all the world’s a stage for the women and their admirers (ibid). In this way, “Two Little Girls from Little Rock” represents not so much an actual account as a performance of motility – the choreography of the sequence serving as the essential language that articulates the women’s determination to move *from* someplace *to* somewhere.



“Two Little Girls from Little Rock.”

Where Young’s theory of double spatiality offers a concretization of Nell’s poignant quandary in *Don’t Bother to Knock*, the distinction between “here” and “yonder” spaces finds a light-hearted variation in this musical number. Shifting Young’s unsatisfactory “here” into the “there” of the past in Little Rock, Lorelei/Monroe and Dorothy/Russell celebrate their journey towards the once-elusive “yonder” field of success – the latter given substance through the parameters of the stage itself. It is to these dual dimensions that the women’s dance routine dramatizes: gesturing and looking to the side to denote the poverty of their early days “there,” striding forward with arms outstretched towards the more lucrative, “yonder” future they ultimately attained. Within the envisioned space of the scene, however, it is Monroe who continually attracts the eye. While Russell, wry and good-natured throughout the film, seems almost bemused at her own role in the sequence, Monroe lacks any such reservation. Self-aware rather than self-conscious, she performs with an air of flirtatious pleasure that complements the precision of her dancing; and matching the gleam of the points of light that reflect off the sequins on her dress, she travels through the scene with an effervescence that makes literal the Barthesian “floating flash” (53).

After the musical number, Lorelei tells Dorothy that she could see the shape of a jewelry box inside the pocket of her fiancé’s

jacket; to which Dorothy replies, “You know, I think you’re the only girl in the world who can stand on a stage with a spotlight in her eye and still see a diamond inside a man’s pocket.” Yet in the context of “Two Little Girls from Little Rock,” it is Monroe herself who acts as the “spotlight” in the eye of the spectator. Directing the gaze of her audience in flashes of physical intentionality and ethereal vitality, Monroe fully inhabits the frames of the sequence “on-stage” and on-screen. A moment near the end of the scene highlights this position, when Lorelei/Monroe stands in a medium-shot singing about her philosophy of love and commerce. As her solo reaches its conclusion, the camera pans in for a close-up – a movement that underscores Monroe’s magnetism in the present tense of that image, the beaming spotlight of her visage now held within closer parameters.

In her reading of the shot, Mulvey also perceives a *punctum*, but one that evokes an awareness of Monroe’s death rather than her life. Recalling Barthes’s contention that the photographic *punctum* may capture the shadow of mortality, Mulvey proposes that the actress’s “death was already prefigured in this pose” (*Death* 24x 173) of relative quietude. Yet even if Monroe is fairly still within the frame of the shot, the camera itself moves towards her as if responding to the pull of her *photogénie*. With this attraction to Monroe’s cinematic vitality, the film’s body seeks to discover “what will be”: a gesture of anticipation towards an unknown future rather

than an inevitable end. In this sequence's explication of Monroe-as-Lorelei's "life external" (Barthes *Camera* 57), the *punctum* of the star's presence centers on the cohesion of the "there" and "yonder" fields she traverses; a unified corporeal identity linking past, present, and future motility within the existence of a searching subject – "I was young and determined/ to be wined and dined in ermine" – conscious of her object-ive value – "...I did very well on Wall Street/ Though I never owned a share of stock."

Lorelei: You must think I was born yesterday.

In his study of Monroe, McCann describes her as "the sole star for the camera" in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (99). Certainly her stunning appeal in numbers like "Two Little Girls from Little Rock" and "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend" seems to overshadow Russell's alternately hearty and sardonic performance (one that, comparisons to Monroe notwithstanding, contributes mightily to the overall success of the film); yet the *punctum* of Monroe's presence does not require the flamboyant costuming and centre-frame positioning cited by McCann in order to make its impact on the viewer.⁷³ In the middle of the film, a brief scene between Lorelei/Monroe, Piggy/Coburn, and a precocious child removes the actress from the glamorous *mise en scène* that defines the greater part of the work and places her instead in an innocuous setting that

⁷³ In their article on the film, in fact, Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca comment upon the ways in which the *mise en scène* of the film refuses to craft a fetishistic image of either Lorelei/Monroe or Dorothy/Russell.

emphasizes the versatility of her subjective and objective cinematic self.

After searching through a private detective's cabin in order to find photographs that may compromise her upcoming marriage, Lorelei finds herself locked in the room and tries to exit through the porthole. Stuck halfway through the window, Lorelei sees child millionaire Henry Spoffard, III (played by George Winslow) approaching on the deck and asks for his help – only to find Piggy also making his way towards her. Henry hands Lorelei a blanket to hold up to her chin, and then hides underneath it in order to make it appear that she is sitting up above the deck chairs. In this absurd *ménage*, the hybrid body of Lorelei and Henry engages in a dialogue with a roguish Piggy, who even goes so far as to try to kiss “Lorelei's” hand. When the old man finally exits the scene, Henry emerges from the blanket to remark, “How can you stand that doddering old wolf? Can't you see his intentions are not honorable?”



Creating the hybrid of Lorelei and child.

Where the opulent milieux in which Lorelei usually resides – stages, state rooms, cocktail parties – represent the situational counterpart to the woman's allure, this scene offers an utterly neutral backdrop against which to place her. With only her face visible, the "spotlight" of Monroe-as-Lorelei's presence is offset by the stark, whitewashed walls of the ship and the dark tartan of the blanket she holds to her chin. And in the beginning of the sequence, a shot of her hips struggling to fit through the porthole presents a literal diminishment of her formerly expansive surroundings. Resiliently photogenic, however, Monroe appears as the *punctum* of aesthetic attraction within the incongruous landscape. Contributing to her striking emergence from this series of seeming limitations is the affirmation of, to adopt Young's terms, her body's "continuous unity" with her surroundings – an enhancement of her relationship to the material forms that surround, rather than bind, her lived-body.

In her analysis of the vexed female corporeal presence, Young notes that women often experience a "discontinuous unity" with their environments, enduring a disconnection between the actions they intend and the successful enactment thereof ("Throwing" 38). What they seek, by contrast, is a continuous unity of existence through which their surroundings take form as "a[n]...extension of [the body's] own being" in a "synthesis" of self and milieu (37 – 38) unconstrained by exigencies of gender expectations. This pursuit of one's bodily connectedness to the matter of the world allows for a

broadening of existential awareness in the self; and from this perspective, Lorelei/Monroe's ostensible quandary transforms into an expression of continuous corporeality, an opportunity to explore the unity of her being in the immediate execution of intention. The shot of Monroe's hips, of course, speaks to the thwarted physicality of "woman" as mere object for visual consumption; yet the framing of the porthole itself also provides a concrete context that determines Lorelei/Monroe's subsequent embrace of her material surroundings. Grasping the fabric of the blanket to her face, "adopting" the child as an extension of her body, Lorelei/Monroe shifts her physical identity from the spectacular subjective-objectivity of "Two Little Girls from Little Rock" to the cohesive corporeality of an objective-subject.

Lorelei/Monroe's conjunction with a child here recalls Rollyson's characterization of her as a "wise child" (4) throughout the movie – a notion pondered by critics like Mulvey and Dyer in their readings of the fundamental instability of the character of Lorelei as performed by Monroe. Where Mulvey mentions how "Lorelei's attitude to life zigzags" (*Fetishism* 49), Dyer describes Monroe-as-Lorelei as being "simultaneously polar opposites" (*Stars* 130); that is, Lorelei is both cunning and naïve, cynical and ingenuous in an intertwining so convoluted as to resist the differentiation between Girard's "mask" and "real face." (Morin himself described Monroe as a quintessential "good-bad woman" throughout her films in the 1950s – a "vamp" with "a big heart"

(*Stars* 22).) With the hybridity of the child-woman so depicted in this sequence with Piggy and Henry, however, the abstract notion of Lorelei/Monroe's duality takes shape as an actual construction – a synthesized, continuous unity between the objective and subjective registers representative not of instability but rather the versatility of the embodied experience.

Lorelei: It's just as easy to fall in love with a rich man as a poor man.

Expanding upon the motivations behind the strategy of coquetry, Girard writes in terms that imply an almost commercial interest in desire on the part of the subject:

In a world that is utterly devoid of *objective criteria*, desires are devoted entirely to mimetism; everyone has to try to *convert to his own benefit* mimetism that is still seeking *a point to fix on* which it will always find by reference to other desires. (Emphases mine; 371)

With an implicit understanding of the mimetic crisis that impels the longing of the other, the woman casts herself as a coquette in order to control – “convert to [her] own benefit” – the amorous interest of the disciple-subject continually searching for a model-object through the imitation of desire. In this acknowledgement of the vagaries of attraction, inspired not by “objective criteria” but ever-shifting investments in the ideality of the model, the coquette attempts to create a measure of stability in her own identity as a pursued entity; an absolute “point to fix on” in the equation of desire.

In the famous “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend” sequence from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, this uneasy balance between the fleeting and the concrete, the variable and the absolute finds spectacular expression. Guided by a song that articulates the need for a material trace of ephemeral desire – “There may come a time when some hard-boiled employer thinks you’re awful nice/ But get that ice or else no dice” – the musical number defines Lorelei’s attempt to “convert to her own benefit” the shifting romantic economy between men and women. Cultivating her coquettish ideality whilst attesting to its motivating strategy, Lorelei performs a musical valentine to the objective criteria of the gold-digger; whilst Monroe herself reaches the Technicolor zenith of her role as the floating flash of the film.

The sequence opens as stage curtains draw back to reveal a long-shot tableau of red, pink, and black as dancers waltz and a black chandelier constructed of posed women turns steadily in the centre of the stage. Amidst the motion is a seated Lorelei/Marilyn, who has turned her back to the audience in statue-esque composure. A subsequent shot focuses on the chandelier-women; and a pan to the right then captures a long-shot of men and women spilling gracefully over the crest of a red-carpeted stairway. A cut to a closer long-shot of the dancers focuses on the weightlessness of the female dancers, dressed in frothy pink gowns, and the dashing momentum of the tuxedoed men who partner them. Moments later, as their ballet concludes, Lorelei/Monroe awakens from her reverie to turn and

discover a group of men appealing to her with red hearts outstretched. After a brief interplay of resistance and pursuit, she finds herself standing at the top of the stairway surrounded by the men and their hearts – which she rejects with an operatic flair, only to begin her musical discourse on love and commerce.



From "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend."

For the remainder of the scene, Lorelei/Monroe remains the centre of attention and attraction. Whether encircled by men holding jewelry for her delighted grasp, or admired by a group of female dancers who gather at her feet to hear her wisdom, Lorelei/Monroe travels through the number with an air alternating between flirtatiousness and directness; utterly coy with the men while in straightforward conference with the women. She is, simply, the "point to fix on" in the material universe of the scene, the *punctum* that pierces the gaze amidst the splendor of the vignette. Certainly this overtly theatrical rendering of the questions of subject-ivity and object-ivity – with the women literally objectified as chandeliers and

candelabras⁷⁴ and the men functioning as extensions of the jewelry they proffer – presents the ultimate spectacle of the exchange of the look that determines the film’s visual system. Yet the form of Monroe-as-Lorelei herself as she both revels in and expounds upon her deliberate coquetry stands as an even more unifying entity within the scope of the sequence.

Just as Hayworth’s performance of “Put the Blame on Mame” represented the triumph of the actress’s merging of her own lived-body with the *film noir* body of *Gilda* itself, Monroe’s presence in “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend” finds its affect in her dynamic relationship with this quintessential Technicolor tableau. Indeed, here she appears as the chromatically animated double of Hayworth’s chiaroscuro-laden entity, the musical comedy revision-ing of her dramatic predecessor.⁷⁵ Wearing a rose-colored dress (directly recalling Hayworth’s strapless gown in *Gilda*) with a hint of black and, of course, diamond jewelry, Monroe-as-Lorelei assumes the landscape of the scene on her person – even as the contrasting tones of her blonde hair and fair skin assert the autonomy of her corporeal identity. In this way, Monroe co-exists with the materiality of the

⁷⁴ Arbuthnot and Seneca view this instance of female objectification as an element of “sadistic fantasy” within the film, a moment deferential to “patriarchal relations of power between the sexes” (118). In considering the economy of the gaze circulating between both men and women throughout the movie, however, the image appears less sadistic than farcical. (With this in mind, it is worth remarking upon the fact that the men in this scene offer their hearts to Lorelei/Monroe as cardboard objects.)

⁷⁵ Interestingly, Mulvey reads the notion of “femininity as masquerade” so expressed in this film through the figure of the “dumb blonde” as a comic parallel to the fatal woman of *film noir* (*Fetishism* 49).

cinematic body in a climactic realization of the continuous exchange between her subjective and objective selves.



Left: Hayworth as Gilda; right: Monroe.

It is this conjunction of subject and object, actual self and mask that founds the sensational luxury of the musical number. Celebrating both the strategy of Lorelei-as-gold-digger and the authenticity of Monroe's photogenic impact, "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend" presents cinematic existence as a shifting between the registers of experience through an exchange of the look that ensures their equivalence. The dimensionality of the sequence becomes all the more apparent several scenes later, when, in a narrative twist, Dorothy/Russell impersonates Lorelei/Monroe. Performing both Lorelei's character and her song with all of the objective mannerisms but none of the subjective depth inherent in Monroe's presence, Dorothy/Russell takes part in a masquerade that only emphasizes the existential complexity of the original figure.

In so considering the profundity of Monroe's portrayal of Lorelei, the words of the studio that denigrated her contribution to the

movie (“Remember, you’re not a star”) seem laughable. Moreover, Monroe’s indispensability to the film greatly supersedes her wry self-appraisal; for more than “the blonde” referred to in the title, she is here one of the most fully-realized Hollywood stars. Giving expression to both the ephemeral and the corporeal, Monroe glimmers as an ineffable *punctum* – one that, to borrow from Girard, represents the material and immaterial “point to fix on” (371) in the fluctuating visual economy of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.

IV.

Bus Stop: Impassioned illumination

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes describes the visual impact of a given subject in terms of his/her relationship to luminosity: “The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me” (80). Theorizing light as a means of connection, even communication, between photographed entity and viewer, Barthes defines it as “a sort of umbilical cord...[L]ight, though impalpable, is here a *carnal* medium, a *skin I share* with anyone who has been photographed” (emphases mine; 81). It is no exaggeration to state that Monroe’s cinematic presence in any of her films exemplifies this concept, with her striking incandescence on the screen emanating from what photographer Eve Arnold called the “flesh impact” (26) of her material form. It is Monroe’s performance as Cherie in *Bus Stop*, however, that signals a refinement of this legendary embodied

luminosity – a moment of transformation in which the actress channels her inherent radiance towards the creation of a nexus, an “umbilical cord” of a floating flash between star, filmic body, and spectator.

These questions of connection and communication find their diegetic counterpart in the romantic relationship between Cherie and Beau (Don Murray). When the naive cowboy sees Cherie, a “chanteuse” in a rundown bar who dreams of stardom in Hollywood, he seeks to capture her with as much determination as he approaches his rodeo riding. Literally roping Cherie into joining him on his ranch in Montana, Beau overwhelms the young girl – until he finally realizes that he must, as she says, “treat...[her] with a little respect” and wins her utterly. For Cherie, a character so concerned with her “direction” in life that she carries a map marking her path to Hollywood, the direction of love must lead towards a dialogical understanding between two individuals. As she relates, “I’ve got to feel that whoever I marry has some real regard for me, aside from all that loving stuff.” Unlike Girard’s coquette, whose “flame...can only burn on the combustible material provided by the desires of others” (371), Cherie seeks a romantic passion borne of what Sobchack calls “an *active devotion*” (*Carnal* 288) to another; an awareness of that individual’s subjective and objective identity and a desire to “embrace [his/her] alterity *as our own*” (289). With Monroe’s luminosity calling for the spectator to “share the skin” of her on-

screen self in an extra-diegetic parallel to Cherie's insistence that Beau recognize her discrete identity, both relationships represent the realization of a passionate attachment founded not in hierarchical binaries but mutual engagement.

Beau: That's her, that's my angel...Look at her gleaming there, so pale and white.

In her first scene in the film, Cherie/Monroe outlines the course of her life. After a small-town upbringing in the Ozarks, she has been making her way across the country with the dream of fame and fortune in Hollywood. Transforming herself from a "hillbilly" to a "chanteuse," with the ideal of movie stardom ever-guiding her, Cherie plots the trajectory of her identity as clearly as she marks her path to Hollywood on a well-worn map; as she explains to her friend, "I've been trying to *be* somebody." With this exchange taking place after drunken cowboys burst into Cherie's dressing room and grope her roughly, these words bespeak not simply a desire for stardom but a longing for inviolability – a measure of self-preservation made possible in a fantasy-world called Hollywood in which, as Cherie enthuses, "You get discovered, you get tested, with options and everything! And you get treated with a little respect, too."

Truly, a process of poignant juxtaposition constructs these opening moments that introduce Cherie's character: the contrast between the young woman's vulnerability and her dream of "respect"; the dingy dressing-room in which Cherie envisions the wonder of "Hollywood and Vine"; and, moreover, the musings on

that locale given voice by a star who would have surely recognized the naiveté of Cherie's perspective. As if underscoring this sense of disparate forces, the first few minutes of the dialogue take place with Cherie/Monroe sitting at a vanity table, her back to the camera and her face reflected in the mirror in a pose that highlights the distinction between actuality and projection. Yet in this placement of Monroe's body between the gaze of the viewer and the mirroring of her image, the shot shifts from an expression of disjunction to a declaration of the actress's proximity to the spectator and the filmic body itself. Establishing an immediate rapport with the physical form from which, to recall Barthes' remark, "proceed radiations which ultimately touch" the spectator, this moment asserts the privileging of the "actual self" over the mask of illusion.

In this way, Cherie's subsequent rendition of "That Old Black Magic" represents not so much a performance as an exploration of her ideal self – a rehearsal, that is, for the day when she is "discovered." As Richard Dyer notes in his discussion of *Bus Stop*, "[W]e see how she is producing her image" (*Heavenly* 60) in this musical number: Stepping onto a small stage, the lighting of which she controls by kicking at switches along its perimeter, Cherie sings in an earnest, off-key voice while adding a flourish to the lyrics with choreographed movements. In her first scene, Cherie spoke of her regard for movie stars and the way in which they "put over their songs and their gestures"; and undoubtedly this number offers

confirmation of Cherie's eager modeling of herself after those cinematic idols. Matching what Sobchack describes as the filmic body's "visible representation...of activity coming into being and being" (*Carnal* 146), the evident deliberation with which Monroe-as-Cherie constructs herself as a "chanteuse" grants the spectator a kind of intimacy to this work, or rather identity, in-progress.



"That Old Black Magic."

Where *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* presents its musical numbers as spectacles of precision and fluid performativity within luxurious settings, Cherie's version of "That Old Black Magic" takes place in a more grounded environment. Through the beginning of the song, there are cuts to the drunken cowboys carousing in the bar, and a shot of Beau himself when he first sees Cherie. Instantly infatuated, Beau interrupts the number with a demand that the men sit quietly and listen to Cherie; and the scene continues with frequent cuts to Beau as he watches a delighted Cherie resume her song. In a sequence comprised of the conflicting elements of Cherie, the noisy

crowd, and Beau, the point of focus providing cohesion is Monroe's form – or, more precisely, the luminosity of her form.

Bathed in the spotlight that shines from her small stage, Monroe-as-Cherie consistently attracts the eye as, in Beau's words, a "gleaming" entity, "pale and white" standing above the shadows of the saloon in what Rollyson calls "her *own* light" (emphasis mine; 109). Though her emerald and black costume seems to blend into the greenish-grey mist of the bar, Cherie/Monroe nonetheless stands in contrast to her surroundings through the lustre of her flesh impact, extending beyond the parameters of the frame and screen to affect the viewer him/herself. Even when Cherie briefly changes the lighting to a vibrant red, the scarlet tones that suffuse her body serve to complement the whiteness of the skin that has absorbed this chromatic shift. If light in photography represents, as Barthes proposes, a "carnal medium" (81) uniting the body of the referent with the body of the viewer, then the radiance of Monroe in this sequence – linking as it does the disjointed facets of the diegetic situation – further connects her to the body of the film itself. For emanating throughout the various cuts demanded by the narrative exigencies of the scene is Monroe-as-Cherie, her iridescent immediacy crafting an intersection between on-screen presence, filmic body, and spectator.

Cherie: I ain't the kind of girl you thought I was.

In his discussion of Cherie's opening scene, Dyer notes that the sequence provides a commentary on "what it means to be someone who lives by being gazed at" (*Heavenly Bodies* 62). Certainly the narrative goes on to stress Cherie's role as an object for amorous projections and more earthy attentions – indeed, it is a male point-of-view shot that introduces her first appearance in the film. In addition to singing in the bar, Cherie must also essentially hustle the customers, encouraging the men to buy her drinks and so spend more money in the establishment. Girard has remarked that a salon is the "Versailles of coquetry" (371), placing the woman at the center of worshipful male attention; yet in *Bus Stop*, the Girardian high-society salon translates into the forced flirtation of the saloon. Wearily donning the mask of feminine wiles, Cherie approaches each client with the same line: "Hello mister, I wonder if you'd buy me a drink. I'm so dry I'm spitting cotton."

Beau, however, projects onto Cherie a far more idealized vision of femininity. She is his "angel," a symbol of purity beyond the mire of carnal desires. After he has pursued Cherie and forced her to join him on the bus journey back to his home in Montana, a snowstorm forces the couple and their fellow passengers to spend the night at a diner. It is in this innocuous setting that Cherie reveals the truth of her past, trying to dispel the young man's illusions: "I ain't the kind of girl you thought I was...I'd had other boyfriends 'fore you...Quite a few." The exchange takes place in a medium-shot,

with a panoramic CinemaScope framing that captures Beau and Cherie as they sit to the left and right, respectively, of the expansive space.

For the duration of this single take, the shot is bisected between Beau, laconic in his disappointment, and Cherie, as she falteringly but bravely tells him about her “wicked life.” Adding to this sense of isolation is the division of illumination within the image: Where Beau’s stoic form appears earth-bound and shadowed by his heavy clothing and set expression, Cherie seems an embodied extension of the light that shines through the window behind them. Against the backdrop of a white lace curtain, Monroe-as-Cherie grants fleshly parameters to the sunshine radiating from the exterior, her hair a reddish-gold and the skin of her face and upper chest a pale white.⁷⁶ There is a weightless quality to Cherie/Monroe in this image, a delicate physicality heightened by the timbre of the actress’s voice. Recalling Barthes’s definition of the “grain of the voice” as “the body of the voice as it sings...[inspiring the listener’s] relation with the body of the man or woman singing” (*Image* 188), the soft (not to say breathy) soprano of Cherie/Monroe’s speaking voice⁷⁷

⁷⁶ For this film, Monroe wore a very pale face powder to create the impression of what director Logan described as “a little nightclub singer who always went to bed at five or six in the morning after drinks...a girl who never really saw the sun” (in Rollyson 104).

⁷⁷ Sarah Churchwell points out that the notoriously “breathy” quality of Monroe’s voice is one of “the clichés about the Marilyn persona [that has] overtaken the reality of her performances...Monroe used ‘breathiness’ when playing a certain kind of role, when creating a seductive moment” (57).

creates an aural lightness that further enhances the ethereal suspension of her confessional moment.

Sobchack has set forth that “the passion of suffering” – whether as a personal or witnessed experience – evokes “an increased awareness of *what it is to be a material object*” (*Carnal* 288) vulnerable to the actions of others. Accompanying this awareness, Sobchack writes, is an “engage[ment]...with our primordial, prereflective, and passive material *response-ability*” towards surrounding entities (*ibid*). In this scene, the passion of Cherie’s suffering takes shape in a gesture of fragile tactility: As she tries to assure Beau that he will be “better off” without her, her hand flutters above him briefly and then comes to rest softly on his shoulder. In contrast to the roughness with which men, including the well-meaning Beau, have objectified her, Cherie asserts her material subjectivity with a gentleness – a *lightness*, in fact – that seeks Beau’s understanding even while accepting the possibility of his withholding it. In the cohesion of the sensory interchange between film, star, and viewer, moreover, Monroe-as-Cherie’s motion also calls upon the response-ability of the audience; and from her glimmering physicality, then, comes an action which bears Barthesian “radiations which ultimately touch” the spectator as well as her diegetic lover in this moment of wistful intimacy.

Beau: I like you the way you are.

In her article on the significance of Monroe's relationship to CinemaScope filmmaking in the 1950s, Lisa Cohen perceives a parallel between the latter's evocation of the expanse of "postwar prosperity and anxiety" to the actress's own "relation to the questions of excess, containment, and visibility" (273) in the crafting of her extra-diegetic persona. Cohen goes on to analyze Monroe's appearance in CinemaScope production *How to Marry a Millionaire* (Jean Negulesco, 1953), a comedy glamorizing the intersection between capitalism and domesticity in a celebration of Monroe's spectacular appeal. Yet in the realist milieu of *Bus Stop*, the panoramic framing provides vistas not of glorified femininity but of identities-in-transition, disenfranchised individuals aspiring to dreams of Hollywood and angels beyond the immediate cinema-scope of the diegetic world. As imaged within the grand space of the filmic body, *Bus Stop*'s saloons, rodeos, bus interiors, and diners represent conditional realms that offer both the chance for interpersonal connection and the possibility of miscommunication.

With this aura of vexed potential – either met or lost within the vastness of the frame – pervading the film, the concluding declarations of love between Cherie and Beau provide not only a "happy ending" but a triumph of reconciliation. In a scene following Cherie's confession, there is a shared medium close-up of the couple, with Cherie's upper body lying along the bottom of the frame and Beau standing behind and leaning above her. An utterly shared

space, with the two bodies merging in their suffusion of virtually the entire frame, this creation of what Martine Beugnet calls the “body-landscape” (“Close-Up” 29) gives material expression to the emerging union between the individuals; as Beau tells Cherie, “I like you the way you are, so what do I care how you got that way?” In this declaration of “active devotion,” Beau “embrace[s] [Cherie’s] alterity as [his] own” and transforms the CinemaScope frame into a panorama of passionate recognition.



The body-landscape of Beau and Cherie.

Further exploring the passionate possibilities of the CinemaScope perspective is a subsequent close-up of Cherie/Monroe. When Beau once again professes his love, Cherie’s enraptured response takes place in a close-up so extreme that it excludes the top of her head within the wide horizontal frame. Where the two-shot of Beau and Cherie makes manifest their material/romantic integration, this close-up of Monroe-as-Cherie appeals to the sensory investment of the spectator – the ultimate realization of that “shared skin” that unites the on- and off-screen dimensions. Director Logan described

the shot as revealing “every vein, every tiny bit of facial fuzz, the watery depths of her eyes, the detail of her skin” (in Rollyson 107) in its proximity to landscape of the star’s face; and once again, the intrinsic luminosity of Monroe’s visage serves as a sheen that fuses these discrete elements even as it throws each into relief.

Encouraging the audience to gaze upon the actress with a visuality as delicately caressing as her touch upon Beau’s shoulder, this image is both a meditation upon and exploration of Monroe as floating flash.

If, to recall Beugnet’s description of the cinema of sensation, film “‘thinks’ in moving images and sound” (*Cinema* 60), then the subjective and material intentionality of *Bus Stop* finds its direction – its guiding light, as it were – in the embodied luminosity of Monroe-as-Cherie. Drawing the eye of the spectator to the form of the actress as surely as Cherie attracts Beau’s gaze, light in this work is undoubtedly a carnal medium; one that inspires a romance of response-ability between the extra- and intra-diegetic entities. In this filmic body in which the luster of flesh impact replaces the mask of narcissism, passion evolves from a monologic abstraction to a love affair of material mutuality.

V.

The Misfits: The (im)mortality of the lived-body⁷⁸

⁷⁸ A version of the following was published as “The (Im)mortality of the Lived-Body: Marilyn Monroe’s Screen Presence in *The Misfits*.” In *E-Pisteme* 2.1 (2009). < <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/e-pisteme/?page=issues&issue=02>>.

Distinguishing between cinema and photography, Barthes described films as restlessly “impelled, ceaselessly drawn” (90) forward in their search to depict the phenomena of worldly experience as it “pass[es]” (78) before the eye of the camera. In both diegetic and extra-diegetic terms, Huston’s *The Misfits* captures this sense of the elusive that the cinematic image represents. The screenplay, written by Arthur Miller, traces the desultory quest of four individuals as they search for a place of belonging in the shifting world around them. Incarnating three of these wanderers are stars who would soon pass not only in front of the lens but from life itself: Clark Gable suffered a fatal heart attack only days after the film completed shooting; Montgomery Clift died in 1966; and Monroe died in 1962. *The Misfits* would be her final completed film. As McCann writes in his analysis of *The Misfits*, “[E]ach viewing...is implicitly...a contact with what has ceased to be” (167).

Watching the film with the knowledge of this extra-filmic reality, the viewer confronts the aura of death that haunts Barthes’ conception of the *punctum*: For the camera depicts both “*this will be* and *this has been*...[the spectator] observe[s]...an anterior future of which death is the stake” (96). In photographic imagery, argues Barthes, “a simple click” (ibid) of the camera provides the boundary between life, present at the moment of the shot, and death, shadowing the final, developed composition. As Mulvey elucidates in *Death 24x a Second*, the juxtaposition of the past as preserved in the present

tense of the unreeling film itself inspires “questions that still seem imponderable: the nature of time, the fragility of human life and the boundary between life and death” (53). In its own response to these fundamental issues of film and mortality, Huston’s work presents life and death not as oppositions in a tense dichotomy, but complementary forces that share a tangential relationship rendered visible within the cinematic form itself.



Cast portrait.

Articulating and, more precisely, embodying this flux between life and death is Monroe herself, a figure whose “live” presence exists simultaneously with the fact of her tragic death at the age of thirty-six. Indeed, with a myriad of conspiracy theories attempting to make sense of her untimely passing, Monroe’s death matches her life as a source of fascination and Hollywood legend. Beyond questions of mythic lore, however, Monroe’s performance as divorcée Roslyn Taber in *The Misfits* represents an emblematic expression of her singular ability to incarnate on-screen a reconciliatory force superseding the boundaries set forth not only

between life and death, but also corporeality and ethereality.

Captured by the black-and-white of Huston's camera, the mortal physicality of Monroe's flesh impact has never been more evident; nor has the immortal Barthesian "air," or "luminous shadow" (110) of spirit that radiates from her person. In this elegiac evocation of Monroe as a cinematic floating flash, *The Misfits* represents the site within which the *this will be* and *this has been* of Monroe's screen presence reaches its exquisite apex.

Roslyn: To a certain extent, we're strangers.

The opening moments of Monroe's first scene definitively establish the flux between the modes of corporeality and ethereality that guides her performance throughout the film. Framed in medium-shot, Roslyn/Monroe sits before her dressing-table mirror, applying make-up with shaking hands as she nervously rehearses her statements for an impending appearance in divorce court. The focus of the shot lies in the reflection of Monroe's face in the mirror to the left of the frame, whilst she herself is seated to the right with her back to the camera. Monroe's reflection makes literal Morin's assertion that "the universal magic of the mirror...is nothing other than that of the double" (*Cinema* 28); and certainly Monroe's mirrored form projects the universal magic of the Hollywood star as a divine double for the enraptured spectator. Captured in the luminosity of the looking-glass, Monroe's visage appears in all its iconic beauty as an

image of ideal femininity – simply, she wears the mask of “Marilyn Monroe,” movie star.

As Monroe finally turns away from the mirror to face the lens directly, however, the camera’s pan to the right reveals a somewhat different figure than the one presented in the reflection. Here, Monroe finds herself in a medium close-up that offers no softening of the swelling under her eyes or the lines around them; the strain on her face so diffused in the reflection now becomes altogether apparent. Monroe does not linger in this framing, and stands up restlessly to walk out of the shot – a motion that allows the camera to capture her torso, robed in a silk slip. Rejecting the idealizing distance presented by the mirrored Monroe, abandoning the mask first conceived in Nell’s moment before the mirror in *Don’t Bother to Knock*, this close-up bears an immediate proximity to the actress’s lived-body in all its exhausted reality.

Where Monroe’s *reflection* presents an illuminated smoothness to the camera, the image of her *actual* person introduces an attention to the texture of the human form that persists throughout the film. Not only does the camera record Monroe’s lived-body as it negotiates the space of the frame, but it also insists upon depicting the character of that body’s surface. Unlike the reflected Monroe, a representation of traditional Hollywood star-imagery, this close-up makes visible the various factors that construct the star’s ideality. As it takes in Monroe’s strands of platinum hair, fake eyelashes, and

even the freckles on her arms, the camera highlights the lived-body's significance as the material channel through which the intangible "universal magic" of the double radiates.

If these moments subtly subvert the spectator's conception of Monroe as simply an idealized double, another scene towards the middle of the film addresses Monroe's own relationship to herself as a star. Whereas her first moments on-screen establish the situation of her existence as a lived-body beyond the veneer of Hollywood, this later scene explicitly presents the situation of a more problematic *co-existence* between "Marilyn" the star and Monroe the actress. It opens with a medium-shot of six pin-ups of Monroe from her various glamour-girl incarnations hanging in the bedroom closet of her home. As Roslyn shows another character, Guido (Eli Wallach), the bedroom, he stops before the door to stare at the photographs. Embarrassed, she closes the closet door saying: "Don't look at those, they're nothing...a joke". She finally pushes the fascinated man out of the room, and exits the scene herself by passing close to the camera as she walks out of the frame with a worried, frustrated expression on her face.

In this sequence, the spectator observes a kind of meta-dialogue between Monroe and yet another reflection: that of her past selves. Caught in these pin-ups in her most clichéd poses of female stardom, Monroe represents the Mulveyan object "cut to the measure" of the male gaze (*Visual* 26) – a one-dimensional figure

existing on-screen to satisfy the scopophilic fantasies of the masculine perspective. Yet though Wallach's character clearly incarnates the fetishizing male subject, the Monroe who literally shuts the door on these reflections stands in contrast to the pinned-up woman. Truly, with her hair in braids and dressed in jeans with little make-up, she is nearly unrecognizable as such. Sobchack writes that a phenomenological concern with the lived-body entails an understanding of the human form not simply "as an abstracted object belonging always to someone else...but" as the physical shape of "the concrete, extroverted, and spirited subjects we all objectively are" (*Carnal* 1). Accordingly, what is most significant in this scene is not Monroe's exchange with Wallach, but rather her interaction with those reflections of her past as an objectified abstraction. No longer a passive object of desire, here Monroe assumes the role of a "spirited" and active subject who wants to belong to herself.

Such a juxtaposition between the pin-ups and Monroe herself recalls Barthes's contention that photographed figures "do not *emerge*, do not *leave*: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies" (55, 57) in contrast to cinematic subjects who pass through and beyond the frame in their animated existence. To place this concept in feminist terms, certainly *The Misfits* is not wholly innocent of momentary alliances with the Mulveyan reductive and possessive male gaze; there are, in fact, several male point-of-view shots that anesthetize and fasten-down aspects of Monroe's famous

body in a fetishistic manner. Yet such shots hardly define the Marilyn Monroe of *The Misfits*. Instead, the power of the film lies in its prevailing focus on Monroe's expressive emergence from the fixed one-dimensionality of a frozen past. Reflecting on the extra-diegetic level Roslyn's hope for a different future, Monroe-the-actress evades the Barthesian aura of death that haunts the pin-ups and implicitly chooses life. Though Monroe would face her own mortality only a year after this passing before the movie camera, it is that same movie camera that captures her moment of decision and, in so doing, ensures her very *immortality* as a star.

Roslyn: I don't know where I am yet.

In his study on Monroe, McCann describes the character of Roslyn as having "the abstraction, and the intimacy, of a figure and an object in a dream" (155). Undoubtedly the film acknowledges on both an aesthetic and diegetic level the oneiric qualities of Monroe-as-Roslyn; yet throughout the work, she drifts back and forth across the boundary dividing the realm of abstraction from the more material plane. Indeed, the vision of the movie as a whole seems to gesture towards an understanding of Monroe and her character as the ultimate misfit, an individual unable to completely find her place in either the ideal or the real. As Montgomery Clift's character remarks: "I can't figure you floating around here like this"; to which Roslyn replies, "I don't know where I belong."

Such a concern with notions of place and belonging recalls, once again, the questions of spatial and bodily (dis)continuity explored by Young. As she remarks, the physical self seeks a measure of unity between intention, action, and environment: For “within the same act in which the body synthesizes its surroundings...it synthesizes itself” (38). With an awareness of the human form’s dimensions and possibilities, seeking to identify those spaces that belong to or beyond the lived-body, the individual pursues a continuous unity in his/her engagement with the material world. In transposing these issues to related psychoanalytic terms, Kaja Silverman uses the vocabulary of Lacan’s mirror stage to describe the “mode of ‘altogetherness’” (17), or presence, achieved when the *je* of the subject’s bodily ego unites with the *moi* of ideality presented within the visual *imago*. Early in the film, two sequences explore dual aspects of Roslyn/Monroe’s search to “fit” in the reality around her: one depicting her need to connect in continuous unity with the physical world, the other revealing the fragility of the mode of altogetherness that defines star-presence.

In the first of these scenes, Roslyn stumbles outside in the moonlight after an impromptu party with the cowboys to celebrate her divorce. Laughingly withdrawing from Guido’s drunken attempt to kiss her, Roslyn begins to dance in a graceful drifting movement towards a tree that stands in the middle of the yard. At first, the camera pans to the left to follow this desultory ballet, but soon it

remains motionless as Roslyn moves further away and finally embraces the tree, collapsing her body against it. There is an eerie quality to this sequence, highlighted by the minor tones and discordance that shape the extra-diegetic music to which Monroe-as-Roslyn appears to be dancing; and the camera's static pose bespeaks a reluctance to follow the woman any deeper into what quickly becomes an utterly private and non-performative moment. Here, Monroe's haunting and haunted presence seems to make literal Morin's description of the star as an "autonomous specter" (*Cinema* 26), one now beyond the grasp of the camera or the spectator.

Yet the very elements of nature with which Roslyn so desperately seeks to bond prevent the scene's complete immersion in surreality. As she sways closer to the tree, Monroe seems to merge with the very landscape – her hair, her skin, and even the black of her dress becoming additional layers of texture to the dynamic palette of a frame already filled with moonlight and moving leaves. The sequence, then, is not supernatural but *hyper*-natural. In this way, Sobchack's theory of the "unity of the look" is especially appropriate: With the eye of the camera offering equal attention to phenomena beyond simply the human figure, Sobchack argues, film may reveal a "unity of transcendent being...in the flesh of the world" (*Carnal* 301) – a transcendent unity for which Roslyn/Monroe longs. In clinging to the tree, she has claimed nature as the space within which and to

which her body, as part of the “flesh of the world,” finds continuous unity.



Roslyn/Monroe’s “unity of transcendent being.”

The following sequence, however, shifts to an exploration of the mode of togetherness resulting from the union between real and ideal – a coming together never more evident than in the figure of the Hollywood star. In this way, cinema itself offers another kind of haven for Monroe: that dimension in which, as Morin writes, the star may engage the passion of the spectator and subsequently “focus...love’s magic on” herself (30). In the scene in which Gay convinces Roslyn to stay in Reno, the poetic naturalism that characterized the previous sequence gives way to a classic Hollywood aesthetic that emphasizes the beauty of the film’s star; and for these moments, *The Misfits* captures the myth of “Marilyn” and so purifies the actress of the limitations of mortal physicality.

The scene (as discussed in the introduction) opens in a medium two-shot of Roslyn and Gay seated in a car. The subsequent series of shot-reverse-shots in medium close-up, however, signals the camera-eye's concern not with the "unity of the look" but rather with the woman who, as Gay says, "shines" in her beauty. As in the reflection that introduces her to the film, these shots present a diffused, glamorous Monroe who, to return to Morin's words, stands as a "fantastic construction of man by man" (*Cinema* 26) – the emblem of cinema's ability to create and capture an ideal double of humanity. Not drifting or "floating around" as a lost soul, here Monroe briefly returns to Morin's mirror of dreams to play the part of a movie star.

But at the conclusion of the scene, the theme of mis-fitting and wandering returns. Roslyn asks Gay whether he has a home, to which he replies: "Sure I do... Right here." He nods towards the desolate Nevada landscape through which they are driving, and Roslyn follows his gaze disbelievingly. The sequence ends with a fade-out on a close-up of Monroe's face, looking out the window at the scenery that rushes by in *discontinuous* unity with its inhabitants; the deserted space that her lover calls home. Whereas a kind of balance had existed earlier in the scene, the realization of Gay's drifting ways upsets the confident equilibrium of Monroe-as-Roslyn's mode of togetherness. Ultimately, the tree and the idealizing frame of the medium close-up offer only impermanent

sanctuaries from the restlessness of life, and from a narrative that demands that Roslyn continue her journey towards an uncertain future.

Guido: Here's to your life, Roslyn. May it go on forever.

As referenced in the discussion of *Don't Bother to Knock*, Metz has described film as “a beautiful closed object... whose contours remain intact and which cannot therefore be torn open into an inside and an outside” (94). Throughout *The Misfits*, however, Huston consistently seeks to break open the self-contained world of the film, subtly challenging the aesthetic boundaries of a more illusionist classic Hollywood cinema with his realist sensibilities. Clearly this decision to reveal the “inside and outside” of the film extends to the transformation of Monroe herself from a beautiful closed object of the star system to a fluid figure negotiating the modes of subjectivity and objectivity, corporeality and ethereality; and near the end of the film, Huston stages a climactic sequence in the Nevada desert that definitively tests the parameters of the film and its female star.

The last third of *The Misfits* follows Roslyn and the three cowboys into the country surrounding Reno, where the men plan to capture wild mustangs and sell them to a company that will kill them for dog food. The cowboys see the venture as an expression of their independence from the banal working-day world; Roslyn, however, finds the idea horrifying. After witnessing the almost grotesque

spectacle of the men roping and tying up a mare and her foal, Roslyn/Monroe breaks from a medium shot and runs into the desert. She is next seen in long shot, a solitary figure against the panorama of the desert sand, distant mountains, and blank sky. Screaming into her surroundings, she calls the men “killers... murderers... liars. You’re only happy when you can see something die.” As they listen to these words, the men are positioned in a medium shot that appears tight and almost claustrophobic in comparison to the long shot to which Roslyn/Monroe belongs – what Rollyson describes as a “deliberately awkward” (181) technique that highlights the distance between the guilty triumvirate and Roslyn/Monroe’s outrage.

Here the actress once again becomes part of the landscape, though this time in a moment of assertion and independence. As Huston’s camera seeks out Roslyn/Monroe’s catharsis, it designates the vast expanse of the natural world a place of potentiality and liberation contrasting the prison within which the men are framed. It is within this vista that Roslyn/Monroe finds yet another moment of continuous unity with her environment – now heightened by the Barthesian grain, or “body” of her voice as it suffuses her surroundings with a literally resounding visceral energy that seems to emerge from not only her distant figure but nature itself. Demanding that she be not only acknowledged but *heard*, Roslyn/Monroe has – like the landscape to which she belongs; like the film itself – broken open.



Preparing to shoot the climactic scene.

Early in the film, Monroe-as-Roslyn quietly laments her divorce and wonders what her future will hold: “The trouble is, I always end up back where I started.” This sequence, however, marks the end of this cycle of displacement and unrest. The horses are freed, and Monroe and Clark Gable leave the desert to start out on a shared life. She asks him how they will find their “way back in the dark”; but perhaps what they seek now together is a way *out* of the dark. As the lovers follow the star in the night sky that will lead them to the highway home, *The Misfits* closes not with a traditionally happy ending, but with a hopeful one.

The final image focuses on that guiding light in the sky, the same star that, earlier in the film, Wallach’s character pointed to as he remarked: “That star is so far away, that by the time the light from it reaches us here on earth, it might not even be up there anymore.” How well that statement defines the fascinating and enigmatic presence of any great cinematic star – but of Marilyn Monroe especially. The spectator watches Monroe in any of her films with an

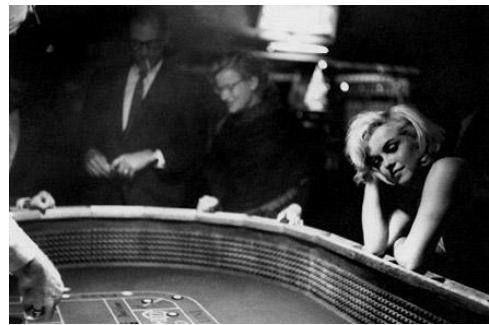
admiration for her talent and *photogénie*, all the while understanding that, as Barthes puts forth, the “luminous shadow” on-screen is just that. Death will be and life has been. But in *The Misfits*, Huston allows the spectator to see the woman casting that luminous shadow, the lived-body from which such ethereality emanates. In a moment of grace, the camera suspends that “simple click” between *this will be* and *this has been*, and Marilyn Monroe *is*.

VI.

Conclusion: The last glimmering of the sacred

During the filming of *The Misfits*, Monroe and Huston spent an evening at a casino. While gambling, Monroe asked Huston how she should throw the dice; he replied, “Don’t think, honey, just throw. That’s the story of your life. Don’t think, do it” (in Guiles 292). Years later, in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes would describe the *punctum* as “...a cast of the dice. A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (27). In applying Huston’s words to the *punctum* of Monroe’s unique presence on the screen, the director does not so much disparage the famously precise crafting of her performances as he calls upon the effortlessness of her intimacy with the filmic body and diegetic character. Here, Huston refers not to “accidents” of winning or losing but to the sheer exultation and hopefulness of simply “throwing the dice” in an on-screen existence – an act of faith that

may be met, as Barthes notes, with poignancy, but just as probably with joy.



At the casino during the filming of *The Misfits* (left photograph: with Huston).

Throughout the arc of her cinematic lifetime, Monroe inhabits the filmic dimension with the very momentum of potential spoken of by Huston, sharing with the audience this same sense of expectancy and possibility as she negotiates the boundaries between mythic mask and actual self. And though *The Misfits* stands as Monroe's final completed performance on the screen, it is in fact her unfinished work in the 1962 project *Something's Got to Give* that provides the true closing moments of her embodiment of the cinematic floating flash. Surviving only in miscellaneous wardrobe tests and outtakes drawn from the vaults of Twentieth-Century Fox, the footage of Monroe offers her audience another chance, as it were, to cast the dice with her; to experience once more the Barthesian union of body and luminous shadow that so defines the actress's *photogénie*.

In her study of the distinction between cinematic and still photography, Mulvey describes the latter as “an unattached instant,” whereas the former “cannot escape from duration, or from beginnings and ends, or from the patterns that lie between them” (*Death 24x* 13, 15). While viewing the remaining instants of *Something’s Got to Give*, however, the spectator can draw few patterns beyond the basic context of costume fittings or random scenes. They are true *motion pictures*, a succession of frames that cohere to craft the ultimate testimony to Monroe’s subjective force within both genres of photographic imagery. McCann has remarked upon the “hieratic, ritual magic” (109) of the footage; yet more than depict a stylized, otherworldly entity, the clips enable an immediate rapport with a woman inhabiting a former present. One series depicts her walking back and forth in various costumes, smiling for the camera in relaxed self-presentation; still another shows her fully engaged in patient interaction with two child actors. Two sequences are especially affecting: one in which Monroe prepares herself for a close-up – composing her face to project an expression of wonder, only to break her concentration – and the now-legendary footage from her nude swimming scene.

With this sequence taking place at nighttime, a light within the swimming pool provides illumination. As Monroe moves with alternating smoothness and splashes, her head bobbing above the delicate waves, she appears as an organic element within the diffused

blue of the water. Accordingly, there is little sensationalism in the accompanying shots of her sitting by the side of the pool, with only a blue robe to cover her nude body; instead, the images evoke the sense of proximity granted in the Barthesian shared skin (81) between Monroe, filmic body, and spectator that so defined her presence in works like *Bus Stop* and *The Misfits*. Like the water itself, Monroe catches and refracts the points of light on her skin and hair until her embodied luminosity transforms the tableau into an expression of the passionate unification of the material and *immaterial* she consistently inspires.⁷⁹ Though extant in fleeting shots and brief sequences, Monroe's final cinematic moments are not disconnected but fused together through the immanence of her illumination.



The swimming scene.

In speaking of Monroe, co-star and friend (and bearer of a similar radiance) Montgomery Clift remarked, “To be an actor, you can’t afford defenses, a thick skin. You’ve got to be open, and people can hurt you so easily” (in McCann 167). Indeed, in the

⁷⁹ Interestingly, photographer Inge Morath remarked that “once [Monroe] was ready [to be photographed], she would surpass the expectations of the lens. She had a shimmering quality like an emanation of water, and she moved lyrically” (in *The Misfits: Story of a Shoot* 71).

passage from a vulnerable, troubled off-screen reality to the incandescence of her cinematic existence, Monroe found not a “thick skin” but the *shared* skin described by Barthes; the convergence and rapture, to borrow from Sobchack’s terms, of that embracing interplay between on- and off-screen subjectivities. From this perspective, the footage of *Something’s Got to Give* resonates not as mere illustration of the final months of Monroe’s life, now shrouded in lore and speculation. These images are, rather, the last glimmering of the sacred.

In her final interview, Monroe offered her own reading of Sobchack’s dialogical engagement between filmic entity and spectator, declaring: “I want to say that the people – if I am a star – the people made me a star – no studio, no person, but the people did” (in Rollyson 208). Truly, with her ability to inspire one of the most devoted relationships between star and audience in all of cinema, Monroe endures so phenomenally not as a tragic heroine but as a *life* force, eternally engaging her audience in the equal joys and poignancy that define an existential “throwing the dice.” Moved by the multi-dimensionality of Monroe’s cinematic presence – her fluid encompassing of the elements of mythic mask and actual self, luminous air and corporeal form – the spectator responds with the subjective depth of his/her own experience to create a synthesis of the on- and off-screen realms. Cultish fascination may shadow Monroe’s myth, but the *punctum* of her filmic identity calls for the respectful

co-existence between actress and audience. In the triumphant realization of Monroe's wish, we do understand her on the screen.

Appearing as she does in the final days of classic Hollywood, it is fitting that Monroe should evoke and, at the same time, offer her own response to a number of the questions of female narcissism and stardom raised throughout this project. Like Katharine Hepburn, Monroe's fluid connection to her own star persona invites an acknowledgement of the dialogical rapport between viewer and viewed-entity; and the vitality of her *photogénie*, like that of Rita Hayworth, heightens the essential impact of the film's lived-body. Further, Monroe began her career in an era when the threat of the double and the vagueness of a Hollywood in transition had already revealed the ephemeral nature of a movie star's ideality. Ultimately, Monroe's cinematic biography bears witness to not only her filmic lifetime but the experience of those that preceded her in the dynasty she inherited. A floating flash illuminating the legacy of the past even as she imbued the cinematic present with incandescent possibilities, Monroe's star-dom was not an abstraction but a material actuality.

In a telegram sent only two months before she passed away, Monroe referenced her continuing struggles with Twentieth-Century Fox, writing, "...I am involved in a freedom ride protesting the loss of the minority rights belonging to the few remaining earthbound stars." Monroe ended the message succinctly, with words that spoke

for every actress who had shared her own glimmering of the sacred:

“All we demanded was our right to twinkle.”

Chapter VII

Beyond the Looking Glass

In an interview taking place during the making of *The Misfits*, Montgomery Clift commented upon the responsibility of the performer to expand the parameters of cinema from the mere reflection of experience to an exploration of its possibilities:

The only line I know of that's wrong in Shakespeare is 'Holding a mirror up to nature.' You hold the magnifying glass up to nature. As an actor you just enlarge it enough so that your audience can identify with the situation. If it were a mirror we would have no art. (In Goode 95)

Applied to film, these words set forth the idea that the affect of a cinematic existence is borne of the exaltation of the myriad “situations” encountered by an individual – holding a “magnifying glass up to nature” to frame the intricacies only glimpsed in actuality. Here, Clift proposes an exchange between off-screen perception and on-screen expression, an identification founded in the spectator and actor’s respective immersions in experience. Claiming the capacity of cinema and its stars to transcend the frame of the looking glass, Clift articulates the necessity of exploring the multi-dimensionality of existence rather than accepting the veneer of its surface reflection.

Indeed, to extend Clift’s assertion to the stars and films discussed in this thesis, one could argue that these lived-bodies of cinema do not merely “hold a mirror up” to the conventional understanding of a narcissistic nature – that is, a monologic obsession with one’s own reflection. Instead, each actress and heroine

contributes her own Sobchackian “existential particularity” (*Address* xv) to the dialogue between the demands of the real and the desire for the ideal that helps to define narcissism. These entities are embodied expressions of classical-era Hollywood’s engagement with the ideal, giving form to a relationship between the real and the mythic that will continue to resonate through the phenomenological awareness of an active spectator. Asserting their subjective and objective capacities, evoking a sensory sympathy with the audience, these entities invite the spectator to share in an intensive exploration of the self and other – not in a privileging of the ideal over the real, but in an affirmation of their connection.

In this way, the films and stars researched here confirm Sobchack’s contention that “the lived-body is excessive and ambiguous in its materiality, its polymorphism, and its production of existential meaning” (*Address* 144). The narcissistic woman of classic Hollywood cinema supersedes her objectification by a patriarchal culture and system of filmmaking; and she inspires more than a fetishistic gaze from the spectator. Instead, she shifts in substance and significance, encountering triumph and disappointment: from Katharine Hepburn’s alternative vision of romantic love to Rita Hayworth’s symbiotic rapport with the filmic body; from the threat of the double in Joan Crawford’s *Mildred Pierce* and Gene Tierney’s *Leave Her to Heaven* to the chronotope of performance time that alternately traps and liberates Norma

Desmond/Gloria Swanson, Margo Channing/Bette Davis, and Eve Harrington/Anne Baxter; and finally to Marilyn Monroe's incandescent negotiation of the boundaries between mask and real self, immortality and mortality. Uniting these polymorphous beings is the sensory investment of the viewer him/herself, the inter-subjective dialogue between film and spectator that provides the sustaining life force for an era of cinema long-relegated to a static one-dimensionality. In this revision of the myth of Narcissus, narcissism bespeaks an engagement with an ideal reflection not in a vacuum of self-absorption, but in an intimate interplay between actuality and possibility.

Indeed, as the chronological focus of this research suggests, that interplay itself encountered redefinition from the height of the classical era to its close. In concluding the thesis, then, it would be helpful to reassess Hollywood's transforming representation of narcissism – or, more precisely, the evolutionary incarnations of the narcissistic woman from Hepburn's *provocateur* in the early 1940s to the revelatory realism of Monroe in *The Misfits*. In *The Philadelphia Story* and *Woman of the Year*, the narratives offer a kind of protective framework within which to contain the threat of the heroines' intense self-absorption and self-sufficiency. Implicitly relating both Tracy and Tess's preoccupation with their own infallibility to WASP-ish eccentricity and sense of privilege, and finally "rehabilitating" the women through marriage, these romantic-comedy diegeses treat the

narcissistic woman as a defiant presence that may be drolly vanquished through her placement within the construct of the couple. On an extra-diegetic level, the star-pairing of Hepburn with Cary Grant and Spencer Tracy in these traditional denouements also allowed the studio to mitigate the actress's own challenging persona and androgynous appeal. The ideal of subdued femininity, then, triumphs over the extra- and intra-narrative force of the rebellious woman.

Yet in *noir*-melodramas *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven*, the narcissistic feminine corrupts, rather than submits to, the normative family structure. As Mildred and Ellen pursue their respective visions of ideality, the force of their desire reveals a narcissism not, as with Tracy and Tess, focused solely on the self, but rather obsessed with a double, an other who either defines or compromises a longed-for existence: Veda, the daughter who both inspires and destroys her mother's dreams of a better life, and Ruth, the sister-figure who quietly usurps Ellen's place in her marriage. Sylvia Harvey has noted that *film noir* presents an image of family-life that belongs to the "abnormal and dissonant," evoking a sense of "disequilibrium" (35). Indeed, in these two films, Mildred and Ellen's narcissism provides the catalyst for the destabilization that takes place – an imbalance further transposed to the embattled star presences of Crawford and Ann Blyth, Tierney and Jeanne Crain. Though the films conclude with a cursory reinstatement of the

dominant fiction, the destabilized identities of the movie stars themselves reveal an endangered ideality.

In her portrayals of narcissistic women, a versatile Hayworth starred in 1940s productions that offered both the normative “happy endings” of the Hepburn movies and the sinister disequilibrium of the Crawford and Tierney films. In romantic musical comedies like *Cover Girl* and *Down to Earth*, love for a man redeems the heroines from a preoccupation with their own images; and in *films noirs* *Gilda* and *The Lady from Shanghai*, Gilda encounters a double in the form of a persona of her own creation, and Elsa’s obsession with her desires renders her a cipher of womanhood. It is the sequence of the shattering of the hall of mirrors in the latter film, however, that carries out the threat to a cohesive vision of ideality that haunted *Mildred Pierce*, *Leave Her to Heaven*, and *Gilda*. Definitively challenging the notion of the movie star as an idol inviolate, Welles here provides a thematic prologue to the chronotope of performance time that characterized Hollywood’s era of transition in the 1950s. As the women of *Sunset Boulevard* and *All About Eve* negotiate their respective relationships to the glory of performance, a poignancy underlies their narcissistic investment in stardom: that state of being stardom lost to Norma, surrendered by Margo, and fanatically pursued by Eve. In performance time, the concept of ideality reveals itself to be fleeting, elusive; in a golden-age Hollywood ceding to the

next wave of media, ideality is at-a-remove, transcendence tempered by the dual elements of nostalgia and regret.

It is this epoch of Hollywood's uncertainty that Monroe inherited and, indeed, brought to a close. From early 1950s performances, in which she developed the mask of her persona, to the intimacy of dramas like *Bus Stop*, in which she aligned emotional gravity and physical affect; and finally to John Huston's realist meditation on fragile idealism in *The Misfits*, Monroe's cinematic journey presents a microcosmic rendering of the movie star's relationship to both the ideal and the real. In so concluding with *The Misfits*, this project proposes that though the figure of the narcissistic woman begins as a challenge to the societal mores of *haute*-Hollywood, she enters the post-studio era with an awareness of her own vulnerability. Where the diegeses of earlier films had insisted that the woman redefine her conception of the ideal to conform to that of the dominant fiction, *The Misfits* tacitly acknowledges the ephemeral nature of ideality itself. As Clark Gable's defeated cowboy realizes, "It's like roping a dream, now."⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *Cleopatra*, the 1963 epic directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz and starring Elizabeth Taylor, could be seen as a more illustrious valedictory moment closing the expansive era of *haute* Hollywood. At the height of her extraordinary beauty, Taylor portrays the ancient queen in a spectacular rendering of the osmotic interplay between star and role theorized by Morin. Yet her contribution to the production also represents the zenith of the mythic-real life that is, as Morin asserts, the divine right of the star herself; as Mankiewicz stated, "For [Taylor], living life was a kind of acting" (in Spoto 196). Cinematically "born" in Morin's "city of the marvelous" (*Stars* 55) as a child star at MGM Studios, Taylor matured into a leading actress in grand works like George Stevens' *A Place in the Sun* (1951) and *Giant* (1956), Edward Dmytryk's *Raintree County* (1957), and Richard Brooks' *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof* (1958). Between the 1940s and 1950s, Taylor thrived as a figure of captivating on- and off-screen romantic drama, a stable presence even as

In terms of the thesis, then, the narcissistic subjectivity stands as one in a continual process of evolution, as each woman (in that Morinian osmosis between star and role) engages in her personal, unique dialogue – sometimes whimsical, sometimes tragic – between

Hollywood itself shifted from the era of studio dominance to freelancing actors and directors. In the context of the actresses discussed in this thesis, Taylor emerges as a kindred constant: She became a winning child actor in 1944's *National Velvet* (Clarence Brown) only a year before *Mildred Pierce* and *Leave Her to Heaven* were released, and assumed young-adult roles in the later part of the decade so identified with Rita Hayworth. Cementing her star presence in the 1950s, virtually unaffected by the disenfranchising collapse of the studio system, Taylor starred with Katharine Hepburn in *Suddenly, Last Summer* (Mankiewicz, 1959) and presented a foil to Marilyn Monroe's platinum appeal.

It was with the striking combination of her already-remarkable cinematic legacy and the allure of her off-screen persona that Taylor agreed to make *Cleopatra* for Twentieth-Century Fox – for the price of one million dollars (Maddox 157). Indeed, the lore surrounding the making of *Cleopatra* confirms Morin's contention that for the star, "mythic life is real and real life mythic" (55): for Taylor fell in love with Richard Burton, cast as Mark Antony, and the couple embarked on an adulterous affair that captured the attention of the world. As Lucy Hughes-Hallett points out, the affair and its reverberations – which Burton referred to as "*le scandale*" – transposed "the sacred energy of Dionysian excess" linked with the historical Antony and Cleopatra to contemporary culture (356). A sensationalist press chronicled the quarrels and reconciliations between the stars; and the Vatican made a public statement condemning the lovers (Maddox 169). As if transforming the expansiveness of the osmotic engagement between star and role into an excessive suffusion of on-screen sensuality into off-screen reality, Taylor and Burton appeared to the public, in Mankiewicz' somewhat terse words, as "two actors who did not know when the show was over" (in Spoto 198). Complementing the Taylor-Burton drama were tales of the escalating costs of the production itself, which nearly drove Mankiewicz to a nervous breakdown and almost bankrupt the studio (see Hughes-Hallett 355 – 364).

In contrast to the melancholy "twilight of the gods" that, as Morin notes, closed the era of Garbo and her silent-film contemporaries (*Stars* 9), the making of *Cleopatra* wrought an incendiary, passionate conclusion to the era of classic Hollywood surveyed in this project. A microcosmic world formed by entwining extra- and intra-diegetic events, entrancing its audience with its deliberate evocation of the divine majesty of the star, the production of *Cleopatra* represents the emblematic realization of golden-age Hollywood's determination to "*live its legend*," recalling Morin's terms. But as the repercussions of the experience revealed, such a legend could not sustain itself indefinitely. Financially shaken by the turmoil of *Cleopatra*, Twentieth-Century Fox made expendable a star who had greatly defined the studio's success in the 1950s: Marilyn Monroe was fired from the difficult filming of *Something's Got to Give* in the summer of 1962, with the understanding that, as a Fox executive admitted, "No studio can afford her and *Cleopatra*" (in Maddox 172). In this last rush of golden-age opulence and decadence, that is, no studio could afford two goddesses. That "life without limits" (55) described by Morin – so intrinsic to classic Hollywood stardom since its inception – was not, as *Cleopatra* and its elegiac excesses bespeak, without a cost.

the exigencies of reality and the possibility of ideality. With the groundings of these two registers placed not in opposition but in dynamic interplay, the productive instability of narcissism reveals itself; the interrogation, that is, of the parameters between reality and ideality, corporeality and ethereality generated by the individual's resistance to a delimited existential experience. To phrase the issue in terms borrowed from the *Queen Christina* monologue included in the Introduction, the narcissistic woman does not belong to myth, merely "a symbol...eternal, changeless, an abstraction." She is, rather, "mortal and changeable, with desires and impulses, hopes and despairs" that impel her to strive beyond reality for her reflection of the ideal – whether it take shape in the notion of a perfect self or a child, a lover or the glory of the past.⁸¹

Granting material substance to these yearning subjectivities is the body of the star herself, the fleshly form through which diegetic identity finds physical expressivity. It is this union, contained within the greater contours of the filmic body itself, that evokes the spectator's own dialogue with these classic cinematic works. Eve

⁸¹ As a consideration for further research, it would be intriguing to contemplate embodied reflection of the *male* ideal: the visceral drama of Montgomery Clift; Cary Grant's suave self-containment; the easy grace of William Holden; and the exuberant physicality radiated by Burt Lancaster. Like their female counterparts, these men corporeally inhabit various identities as they actively engage the psycho-sensory subjectivity of the spectator – introducing the possibility of "The Star" as a figure of phenomenological impact transcending gendered binaries. And how, of course, would the notion of ideality-incarnate alter in relation to the stars of world cinema? In what ways does the dialogue between real and ideal, star and spectator change in a move from Hollywood? The narcissistic woman in classic Hollywood film is, in fact, only one of the entities who may move through and beyond the looking glass.

once dreamed of “waves of love coming over the footlights”; yet through an embodied cinematic spectatorship, such an emotional investment finds itself imbued with the phenomenological dimensionality of the viewer’s sensory sensitivities. Turning from the gendered paradigm of psychoanalytic identification, theories of embodiment and visuality allow for an exaltation of the comprehensive lived experience; framing the viewer’s response to film in terms of his/her individual identity as, to borrow from Sobchack, “a sentient, sensual, and sensible ensemble of materialized capacities and agency” (*Carnal* 2). Just as the shifting cinematic contexts of each star and role defy the strict delineation of the real and ideal, so too does the ever-evolving experience of the spectator him/herself resist a relationship to film founded in the dichotomies of subject/object, active/passive.

Furthermore, in considering the current vogue of digital media, an awareness of the immediate and affective engagements in classic cinema – between star and role; film, star, and viewer; and even the registers of reality and ideality themselves – stands as a means of asserting, and even preserving, the embodied subjectivities of “old Hollywood” works. Certainly spectatorship alters with the passing of time: The historical spectator, one contemporary to the classical era of Hollywood, found his/her access to the films and stars analyzed here limited to the space of the movie theatre and the dispersed images in fan magazines and advertisements; yet today’s

viewer, as theorized by Marks and Sobchack, belongs to an age in which technological advancements like video and DVD grant him/her the luxury of engaging with (and, as Mulvey set forth in *Death 24X a Second*, controlling⁸²) the filmic form at any time within the intimacy of home-viewing. The dominance of the digital now represents a further modification of spectatorship, as the audience experiences contemporary cinema's exaltation of the virtual rather than the vital. D. N. Rodowick has noted that as the digital mode of production succeeds analogue recording, the human form finds itself vulnerable to the imposition of synthetic techniques, computer-generated imagery that, as he writes, may "actually efface and in some cases entirely...rewrite the actor's body" (6). With each encounter with contemporary cinema's "cyborg fusions of technology and the body" (ibid), in Rodowick's terms, the spectator approaches a filmic figure not lived but simulated – an entity not comprised of corporeal gravity and ethereal appeal, but one for whom the former is a hindrance and the latter designed by computer code.

Indeed, in 2002, Andrew Niccol's film *SlmOne* parodied this disjuncture between humanity and technology, old Hollywood and the new. Addressing the industry's reliance on the digital, *SlmOne* relates the travails of a director (played by Al Pacino) who discovers a software program allowing him to create a simulated "ideal" actress. Comprised of computer files that have isolated the essential

⁸² Please see the Introduction for an intensive discussion of this work by Mulvey.

elements of an iconic female star, Simone (named after the computer program “*Simulation One*”) is constructed through an “Emotions Index,” “Body Catalog,” and, most interestingly, a “Legends Library” archiving the manner and voice of hundreds of golden-age stars. Accordingly, Simone has what one character calls “the voice of a young Jane Fonda, the body of Sophia Loren, the grace of Grace Kelly, and the face of Audrey Hepburn combined with an angel.” An unknowing, adoring public makes Simone an international star, bestowing upon a digital image an utterly (and ironically) visceral passion. Drolly commenting on the contemporary redefinition of cinematic ideality, *SimOne* depicts the transformation from the existential capaciousness of the flesh-and-blood figure, with her individual attributes of physique and persona, to the mathematical possibilities of pixels and computer code. Even more than this, it captures the incipience of a new kind of nostalgia: not for the perceived glamour and romance of bygone Hollywood, but for the *human body* of the star herself. In this new moment of filmmaking, stars may be, as Simone’s director/creator proclaims, “digitized” rather than born.

In viewing classic cinematic works with an awareness of the connectedness between embodiment and visibility, however, the spectator not only asserts the force of his/her lived identity but also ensures the films’ endurance as subjective, dynamic beings. Classic Hollywood may appear remote, what Morin called a “California

Shangri-La” (55) populated by stars, narratives, and cinematic techniques seeming perhaps “dated” or anachronistic in the context of today’s mode of production and celebrity culture. Yet the films produced in that era exist now as material traces of the legendary dream factory, its works and stars enduring as embodied expressions of the epoch’s exploration of the phenomena of the world. Through the existential investment of an active spectator, contributing his/her subjective experience to that of the movie, these films will continue to evolve.

With such assertions of vital engagement shaping this project, we may now, in conclusion, revisit the image of Phoebe that closes *All About Eve* and that introduced this research. Standing before that multi-planed mirror, smiling at her future selves in quiet anticipation of her success, Phoebe is a renaissance-Narcissus given life in a Hollywood driven to unite myth and reality; a corporeal form merging with the ideal projections of her identity until physicality is virtually indistinguishable from ethereality. The introduction stated that Phoebe is not alone in this scene, surrounded as she is by her reflections – but in this suspension between past and future, real and ideal, she is also in the presence of those who preceded and will succeed her on that journey beyond the looking glass. There are suggestions of Crawford, Davis, and Swanson’s arch melodrama, and Hepburn and Tierney’s challenging beauty; traces of Hayworth’s passionate vibrancy and Monroe’s shimmering sensuality. And ever-

present is the spectator him/herself, contributing his/her own subjective force to that of the film itself. For these on- and off-screen entities, the image is both an evocation of the otherworldly and a celebration of the lived being in its cinematic and human incarnations. It captures, finally, the triumph of a myth brought to life.

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F for Fake. Dir. Orson Welles. Perf. Orson Welles, Oja Kodar. Janus Film, 1973.

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